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General Assembly

Fifty-second Session

Official Records

53rd plenary meeting

Monday, 24 November 1997, 3 p.m.

New York

President: Mr. Udovenko . . . . (Ukraine)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Kpotsra (Togo), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 20

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Notes by the Secretary-General (A/52/270 and A/52/443)

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/52/297, A/52/341, A/52/433, A/52/434, A/52/500, A/52/525, A/52/532, A/52/535, A/52/562, A/52/563, A/52/568 and A/52/678)

Draft resolutions (A/52/L.14, L.16, L.34, L.36, L.37)

(d) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/52/159)

(e) Participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development

Report of the Secretary-General (A/52/586)

Draft resolution (A/52/L.32)

(f) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster

Report of the Secretary-General (A/52/537)

Draft resolution (A/52/L.33)

The Acting President: As announced previously, sub-item (c) of agenda item 20, entitled "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan", will be considered together with agenda item 43 at a later date.

I should like to inform the General Assembly that the Permanent Representative of Luxembourg, on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States, in a letter dated 10 October 1997, requests that the General Assembly hear in plenary meeting a statement by the Observer of Switzerland during the debate on agenda item 20.

97-86575 (E)

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Members will recall that in accordance with the established practice of the General Assembly, observer non-member States may normally make statements only in the Main Committees. However, following consultations, it is proposed that the General Assembly should take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear a statement by the Observer of Switzerland in the course of the debate on agenda item 20?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: In connection with agenda item 20 (b), to date the Assembly has before it five draft resolutions: A/52/L.14, entitled "Special assistance for the economic recovery and reconstruction of the Democratic Republic of the Congo"; A/52/L.16, entitled "Special economic assistance to central African countries receiving refugees"; A/52/L.34, entitled "Assistance for the reconstruction and development of El Salvador"; A/52/L.36, entitled "Assistance for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon"; and A/52/37, entitled "Emergency assistance for the economic recovery and reconstruction of Burundi".

In connection with agenda item 20 (e), the Assembly has before it draft resolution A/52/L.32, entitled "Participation of volunteers, 'White Helmets', in activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development".

In connection with agenda item 20 (f), the Assembly has before it draft resolution A/52/L.33, entitled "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster".

I give the floor to the representative of Argentina to introduce draft resolution A/52/L.32.

Mr. Frigerio (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): At the outset, my delegation thanks the Secretary-General for his report on the "White Helmets" initiative [A/52/586]. The report clearly indicates the strength and quality of the commitment shown by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the unstinting support of the United Nations Volunteers programme. I take this opportunity also to pay tribute to the continuous, intelligent and dedicated cooperation of the Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers, Ms. Brenda Gael McSweeney, through whom we hail her colleagues in Bonn, in Geneva and in the many developing countries where national and international "White Helmets"/United Nations Volunteers have been serving the humanitarian cause.

My Government also thanks the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, with whose help and support the "White Helmets" have consolidated and expanded their efforts.

My delegation also expresses its special appreciation to the Governments of France, Germany and Italy for their generous support, which has enabled the initiative to expand in the past year in Angola and Haiti. We convey particular thanks to Government of Saudi Arabia for its generous contribution that made possible missions in Palestine, Lebanon and Rwanda.

We also thank the Governments of Afghanistan, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Brazil, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Chile, Cyprus, Ecuador, El Salvador, Georgia, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Madagascar, Monaco, Morocco, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Paraguay, Republic of Moldova, Romania, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey and Uruguay, which have joined my country in sponsoring draft resolution A/52/L.32, which it is my pleasure to introduce to the General Assembly.

As the Secretary-General notes in his report, the "White Helmets" initiative is clearly viable in its technical, financial and institutional aspects. This assessment encourages us to explore new ways to consolidate the achievements of the past three years and to make the most of the potential of the initiative, with the cooperation of the agencies of the United Nations system and the States participating in the initiative.

This draft resolution invites Member States to develop and strengthen their respective national volunteer corps to support humanitarian relief operations. Commitment of that kind, of course, requires joint efforts by Governments and non-governmental organizations and by civil society at large: the main source of the human resources that sustain volunteerism.

The draft resolution further invites the United Nations system to encourage increased participation by Member States in the decision-making process and in the implementation of humanitarian activities. Donor countries and specialized agencies must work together and in a complementary way. Recipient countries too must join this dialogue in search of the same outcome: better and more timely aid delivery, with reduced administrative costs.

It is in this broader context that my delegation believes the draft resolution must be considered. Volunteerism has a fundamental role to play in strengthening the response capacity of the humanitarian system, and can at the same time provide Member States with a new quality-control system for humanitarian assistance, avoiding duplicated and overlapping efforts and contributions. We should create conditions that will encourage contributions on the basis of a better knowledge of operations and greater involvement of donor countries at the implementation phase in the field.

Forty countries are already involved in this initiative as donor or recipient countries or through active diplomatic support. Voluntarily and gradually, and in keeping with their respective capacities, Member States can supply the Secretary-General with one or several lists of teams of "White Helmet" volunteers slated to act in case of emergency, at the request either of the Secretary-General or of the agencies or programmes he designates as humanitarian assistance coordinators in a crisis situation. Here we think it important to consider appointing an officer to carry out liaison between national "White Helmet" focal points and the United Nations system.

The national humanitarian assistance "White Helmets" teams could be assigned by Member States or the Secretary-General to act in specific geographical areas or in specific emergencies, in a manner consistent with the approach of the contributing State and the various United Nations programmes. We would thus create a means of bringing together donors and recipients and ensuring prompt and efficient implementation of programmes, a mechanism permitting a better identification of the end use of the contributions. The institutions and programmes of the system would have more realistic data regarding the cost and availability of human resources for project implementation.

This scheme, together with several Argentine missions, has allowed for the successful participation of volunteers and "White Helmets" experts in the Middle East, Africa, Central America, Latin America and Central Asia, covering such needs as drinking water, monitoring of elections, assistance to displaced groups, provision of medical and food assistance and carrying out mine-clearance operations.

Of course, I would not wish to miss this opportunity to renew the invitation for new financial contributions to the "White Helmets" initiative, either through the United Nations Volunteers special window or through other trust funds. A higher level of contributions would allow for even further progress in broadening the initiative's international scope to cover other areas of the world and other humanitarian tasks.

We also think that this draft resolution makes it possible for the United Nations system and Member States to address the question of new sources of financing. In this respect, I am pleased to confirm that our Government will be contributing in the next few days an additional $1 million to the "White Helmets" special window.

Given the commitment we have all made, I hardly need to appeal for redoubled solidarity efforts. Nonetheless, I think this is a useful opportunity to demonstrate our conviction that not only can we show solidarity but also that we can be more efficient and more participatory, by encouraging and facilitating, through support for volunteer service, a greater involvement of civil society in the difficult task ahead.

In this respect, we welcome the Assembly's adoption of the resolution declaring 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers, which recognizes the significant contribution made by volunteers to the well-being and full realization of the aspirations to improve citizens' living conditions, with peace, development and human rights.

The "White Helmets", just like the "Blue Helmets" in the maintenance of peace and security, can give the Organization an effective multilateral tool to combat the scourges of violence, hunger, poverty and injustice.

The Acting President: Before calling on the next speaker, I should like to propose that the list of speakers in the debate on this item be closed at 4 p.m. this afternoon.

It was so decided.

The Acting President: I therefore request those representatives wishing to participate in the debate on this item to inscribe their names as soon as possible.

I now call on the representative of Ukraine to introduce draft resolution A/52/L.33.

Mr. Parashin (Ukraine) (*interpretation from Russian*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the delegation of Ukraine on agenda item 20 (f), "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster".

I am happy that, as the director of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, I have been given a rare opportunity to participate in this session of the General Assembly, which is of historic significance, and to discuss an issue of crucial importance to Ukraine — and not only to us, but to others as well.

More than 11 years have passed since the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster, but the problems generated have unfortunately not diminished. Its ecological and economic effects have been aggravated by socio-psychological consequences.

Dealing with the consequences has become a very heavy burden for Ukraine. By allocating 6 per cent of our State budget to heal the wound of Chernobyl, Ukraine has lost the opportunity to finance many other vitally important programmes for building an independent State, at a time when it is undergoing profound economic reforms.

Ukraine has agreed to decommission the Chernobyl nuclear power plant by the year 2000. This involves major measures which my country, unfortunately, does not have sufficient experience to carry out, and, more important, does not have the funds to carry out. Preparing to close the plant, with international cooperation, is only the initial phase of decommissioning it. It is also a serious social problem for the 6,000 personnel who have managed to secure the plant's safe operation during the 11 years since the accident occurred. In addition, the town of Slavutich, where the power plant personnel and their families live, has a population of 26,000 without support, and unemployment there is expected to reach 17 per cent by 1998.

A memorandum of understanding was signed on 20 December 1995 in Ottawa between the Government of Ukraine, the Governments of the G-7 nations and the European Union on closing the nuclear power plant. This offers real opportunities for cooperation in dealing with the Chernobyl problem.

Ukraine shut down power unit 1 in 1996, ahead of schedule, thereby demonstrating its genuine intention to fulfil its commitments under the memorandum of understanding. However, the global dimension of the task and the current economic crisis mean that Ukraine alone cannot carry the huge expense of solving the Chernobyl problem. A few days ago, on 20 November, a very important Chernobyl Shelter Pledging Conference on raising funds for a workers' shelter project was co-chaired by Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma and United States Vice President Albert Gore here in New York. This Conference proves yet again how serious the Chernobyl problem remains and the importance that countries attach to its solution.

Contributions were made during the Conference, and this means that very soon we can begin making a secure cover over this sleeping threat to global ecology, health and life itself. On behalf of the Ukrainian Government, I should like to take this opportunity to express gratitude to all those who took part in that Conference.

We cannot forget that it is impossible to solve the Chernobyl problem just by decommissioning the power plant. The United Nations inter-agency needs assessment mission which travelled to affected regions of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine last May reconfirmed the complexity of the problem. Having evaluated the situation in all three countries, it stressed the need for further substantial assistance in the areas of public health, socio-psychological rehabilitation, the environment, socio-economic issues and information. There is also a need to finance power capacity to offset Ukraine's losses resulting from decommissioning the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. In addition, there is the question of removing 200 tons of fuel-containing mass from the sarcophagus, because it is a serious ecological threat. As I have said, there is also the issue of social protection for the reduced personnel of the plant and the people of Slavutich, Ukraine's youngest city, where there is a concentration of major intellectual potential.

Chernobyl cannot be regarded as the problem of just one country or group of countries. This unprecedented technological catastrophe was man-made, but it remains a common human tragedy on a global scale. It continues to represent a serious problem not only for Ukraine and other affected countries, but for the international community as a whole.

We are deeply convinced that dealing with the aftermath of the disaster and resolving the whole spectrum of problems involved can be accomplished only through the joint effort of the entire international community. Multilateral cooperation combining the intellectual and financial input of international organizations, international financial institutions and scientific and charitable funds is necessary to mitigate and minimize the consequences of the disaster. In this connection, I should like once again to express our great appreciation for the humanitarian efforts made by the organizations of the United Nations system in mitigating the after-effects of the disaster.

Eleven years have passed, but Chernobyl continues to challenge our technical, scientific and humanitarian thinking. The way in which the world community deals with this problem will show civilization's readiness to deal with tragedies on a global scale.

All nations share a common destiny. Present and future generations are truly striving to live in an ecologically safe environment, and we call upon all countries, international organizations and financial institutions to unite their efforts in implementing the programme to eliminate the severe consequences of Chernobyl and to prevent similar disasters.

As the Secretary-General emphasized in his report, implementation of the programme would translate into positive action the resolve and commitment expressed in many United Nations resolutions on Chernobyl which, regrettably, remain largely unfulfilled.

On behalf of the delegations of Belarus, Japan, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, I have the honour to introduce draft resolution A/52/L.33, entitled "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster". This document expresses concern about the long-term nature of the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear-power-plant disaster, which was a major technological catastrophe, and about the ongoing effects on the lives and health of people, in particular children, in the affected areas of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

The draft resolution takes into consideration the results of the United Nations needs-assessment mission to the affected areas in May this year, as well as the conclusions and recommendations of the United Nations-sponsored seminar, "Chernobyl and beyond: humanitarian assistance to victims of technological disasters", which was held in Moscow, also in May this year.

The draft resolution also requests the Secretary-General to continue his efforts in implementing the relevant General Assembly resolutions by using existing coordination mechanisms, in particular the United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl.

The draft resolution invites donor States, relevant financial institutions and other concerned parties of the international community, including non-governmental organizations, to continue to provide support to the efforts made by Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. Our document also welcomes the decision of the Heads of State and Government of the seven major industrial countries and the European Community, adopted at Denver in June 1997, regarding assistance in securing the environmental safety of the sarcophagus, and also welcomes the preparation of the inter-agency programme of international assistance to areas affected by the Chernobyl disaster. In addition, our draft resolution welcomes the convening by the United Nations of a special international meeting on Chernobyl to be held tomorrow, 25 November 1997, to generate further support for the populations of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

The draft resolution calls upon the United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl to continue his efforts to deal with the health, social, economic and ecological consequences of the Chernobyl disaster in the most seriously affected areas of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine on the basis of the inter-agency programme of international assistance to these areas.

We should like to express our gratitude to those delegations that have sponsored the draft resolution and to those that participated constructively in drafting it. We appeal to all delegations to support our draft resolution; their support is very important to us.

In conclusion, I should like to touch upon another important issue of great concern to my Government: the question of special economic assistance to countries whose economies have been affected by the negative effects of sanctions imposed by the Security Council on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The delegation of Ukraine believes that this issue should remain on the agenda of the United Nations, as earlier resolutions on the issue have not been properly implemented — at least with respect to our country, which has not received any practical assistance to compensate for our enormous losses resulting from our consistent compliance with the sanctions regime. Let me remind the Assembly once again that Ukraine's losses amounted to some $5 billion, so we cannot agree with the view that, once the sanctions were lifted, there was no point in further considering the issue.

The crucial importance of this problem was confirmed last week in the Sixth Committee, which adopted by consensus a draft resolution entitled "Implementation of the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations related to assistance to third States affected by the application of sanctions".

Our delegation intends to introduce to the Assembly a draft resolution under agenda item 20 (b), on economic assistance to States affected by the implementation of Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

We sincerely hope for the understanding and the support of the Assembly.

Mr. Wolzfeld (Luxembourg) (*interpretation from French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union on the question of humanitarian assistance. The following countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with the European Union join in support of this statement: Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, as does the associated country of Cyprus.

Humanitarian assistance is a priority commitment of the European Union. In this connection, we attach particular importance to the coordination of such assistance within the United Nations system.

The coordination of humanitarian assistance within the United Nations system has this year been marked by a concerted effort on the part of the Secretary-General to reallocate responsibilities for humanitarian activities. In this context, we welcome the establishment of the new Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the adoption by the General Assembly on 12 November of resolution 52/12, entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform". The operational activities that were formerly the responsibility of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, have been reallocated to other departments within the Secretariat and to operational agencies within the system.

The secondment of humanitarian personnel from other organizations in the United Nations system, as well as cooperation and coordination between the different agencies, will play a decisive role in achieving the aims of the Office. It is therefore essential to reinforce the role of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee under the chairmanship of the Emergency Relief Coordinator if consistency in policy both at Headquarters and on the ground is to be guaranteed. The viability — indeed, the success — of the new arrangements will depend upon the logical distribution of tasks, on a clear assumption of responsibility and, finally, on a division of labour between Geneva and New York that respects the particular qualities of each of those host cities.

The European Union believes that the principles set out in General Assembly resolution 46/182 will enable the new Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator to take on the crucial tasks of coordinating relief efforts on the ground, organizing public relations activities to attract potential donors and liaising with the United Nations apparatus for maintaining peace. We welcome, in this context, the appointment of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello to the post of Emergency Relief Coordinator. The European Union will offer him its full support. It is our view that the basic services of the Emergency Relief Coordinator's Office should be financed from the United Nations regular budget.

In the effort to strengthen coordination, more attention should be paid to the role of implementing partners entrusted with carrying out many activities and to their relationship with the humanitarian agencies in order to enhance efficiency, accountability and monitoring of the results of humanitarian assistance. An analysis of this matter is contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit.

The European Union will follow with interest the establishment in the coming months of the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. We also attach particular importance to an appropriate follow-up to the reforms in humanitarian assistance in the light of the debate that will take place in the Economic and Social Council as provided for in the Council's resolution 1995/56.

One aspect of humanitarian assistance — the safety of humanitarian aid workers — is unfortunately, becoming a burning issue. The European Union will submit to the General Assembly a draft resolution on the safety of humanitarian workers that reflects our deep concern at situations throughout the world where the safety of such workers is threatened.

The reasons for this state of affairs are many and complex. The general anarchy that reigns in many of today's crisis situations is certainly a factor. But of even greater concern is the evidence that aid workers are more and more being deliberately targeted. This highlights some of the realities now facing humanitarian aid projects. In the past, humanitarian principles and the impartiality of humanitarian action were respected by both sides in a conflict, but these no longer provide adequate guarantees for the security of humanitarian workers. Too often, it has become difficult, or even impossible for agencies and non-governmental humanitarian organizations to reach people affected by an armed conflict or the victims of other emergencies. We are all aware that it is civilian populations and refugees who suffer most in such situations.

Humanitarian assistance is directly affected by the political environment in which it is carried out. At the same time, humanitarian action can have a positive effect on such an environment. Apart from providing emergency relief in a humanitarian crisis, such action also helps reintegrate refugees and ex-combatants into civilian life, and this is often a crucial first step in stabilizing the situation and clearing the way for sustainable development in a country in crisis.

The question of access to people suffering hardships is of vital importance. The draft resolution thus appeals to Governments and parties involved in armed conflicts or other emergency situations to guarantee aid workers unrestricted access to the affected populations and to take all necessary steps to ensure that humanitarian activity can take place in an environment of safety. It also calls on States to hold to account anyone guilty of acts of violence towards aid workers. Finally, the draft resolution pays tribute to those who have given their lives while trying to help people in distress and salutes the courage of aid workers who continue to fulfil their mission, often in extremely dangerous circumstances.

In conclusion, the European Union remains acutely aware of the difficulties caused by natural disasters and complex emergencies, including the adverse impact that such crises can have on neighbouring States in the affected region. In this context, the European Union has offered substantial assistance to neighbouring countries in order to counteract the adverse economic impact of sanctions imposed against the former Yugoslavia. Although economic problems still remain in these countries, the European Union is pleased to note a marked improvement in the situation. The European Union remains, however, deeply concerned about serious humanitarian crises that persist in other regions. We shall, in the future, continue to help those countries as much as possible in their efforts to overcome their economic difficulties.

Mr. Konishi (Japan): Japan has long emphasized the importance of responding to humanitarian crises and disasters effectively and in a coordinated manner, and it has done so in a number of international forums. The issue of humanitarian assistance was discussed at the last substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, on the basis of the report of the Secretary-General. In this context, Japan appreciates the initiatives of the Secretary-General, endorsed on 12 November by the General Assembly, to further strengthen the United Nations capacity for launching coherent and coordinated humanitarian actions under the guiding principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.

My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to express its sincere gratitude to Mr. Yasushi Akashi, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and also Emergency Relief Coordinator at the same time, for fulfilling so ably the difficult mandate entrusted to him and with such limited resources. His achievements in the course of his long years of service at the United Nations deserve our great admiration and deep respect. I believe that his career should serve as a model for present and future United Nations staff members.

I would also like to express my congratulations to Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello on his appointment to the new post of Emergency Relief Coordinator and to wish him great success in his future work. Japan is ready to extend its full support to him in discharging his important responsibilities.

In carrying out his responsibilities, the new Emergency Relief Coordinator is expected to focus on three core functions, namely, policy development and coordination functions in support of the Secretary-General, advocacy of humanitarian issues with political organs and coordination of the humanitarian emergency response to crises. As Japan has long advocated that the Department of Humanitarian Affairs remain faithful to its function as a strategic centre for coordination and that it refrain from becoming involved in the operational field of humanitarian activities, it welcomes such an orientation, and is confident that, with its new and streamlined functions, the Office of the Emergency Relief

Coordinator, together with the strengthened Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), will contribute to an effective response to humanitarian crises. Furthermore, Japan hopes that the proposed steering committee of the IASC, which will consist of six members from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and a representative of non-governmental agencies, will contribute to increasing the speed of that response.

The new Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator will commence operation at the beginning of next year, and it is important that it be structured and organized in such a manner as to ensure optimum implementation of the core functions. In this connection, my delegation wishes to make two comments.

First, Japan feels great concern over the fact that, according to the revised budget, the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator continues to depend largely on extrabudgetary personnel to carry out many of its functions, as did the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. However, inasmuch as the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator is a part of the United Nations Secretariat, further efforts should be made so that its core functions are financed through assessed contributions. To that end, the proportion of the staff funded by the regular budget should be gradually increased and dependence on extrabudgetary contributions reduced.

Secondly, I wish to refer to the Emergency Relief Coordinator's Offices in New York and in Geneva. The new Office will be relatively small in size and focused on its core activities. Considering the importance of a political interface with the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Japan supports the Secretary-General's plan with regard to the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator in New York. However, since the headquarters of major humanitarian organizations, which have direct links with field operations, are located in Geneva, Japan hopes that consideration will be given to the importance of the Office in Geneva when the new structure is finalized.

I would like to reiterate the need to address the issue of a smooth transition from emergency relief to rehabilitation and development. In this connection, the briefing given by Mr. Akashi in the Second Committee last Thursday on humanitarian crises and development was very informative and helpful. As he emphasized, planning for development should start at an early stage so that it will be sustainable, while humanitarian assistance agencies work at the same time to implement programmes that will help stimulate rehabilitation and development. To this end, a mechanism should be established for effecting close cooperation between humanitarian organizations and development agencies, so that the efforts of both may proceed in a coordinated and complementary manner.

Before concluding, I would like to touch upon one very important issue concerning humanitarian assistance. During the debate in the Third Committee earlier this month, serious concern was expressed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and many delegations over the attacks and threats that have been levelled at humanitarian personnel, including those from United Nations organizations. It is of the utmost importance that the international community act to protect humanitarian personnel, and Japan, on many occasions, has urged that this be done. Discussions earlier this year in the Security Council on the question of their safety, in which Japan was an active participant, produced two presidential statements: one on the security of United Nations operations, which was adopted on 12 March, and the other on protection for humanitarian assistance to refugees and others in conflict situations, which was adopted on 19 June. Japan is pleased to join the initiative of the European Union in calling for the international community to address the issue of the safety of humanitarian personnel. In this context, I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, which was adopted by the General Assembly on 9 December 1994 but, to our regret, has not yet come into force. Japan appeals to all countries that have not yet done so to become parties to this important agreement so that it will come into force without further delay. I hasten to add, however, that the adoption of a legal instrument in itself will not solve our problems. Japan continues to speak out on this issue and it will cooperate closely with all Member States in pursuing ways and means of improving the present situation.

Mr. Aass (Norway): Norway warmly welcomes the appointment of Sergio Vieira de Mello as Emergency Relief Coordinator, and we pledge our full support for him in his important new function.

At the same time we would like to express our appreciation for the work and dedication of Under-Secretary-General Yasushi Akashi in heading the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. Norway has strongly supported the Secretary-General's overall reform proposal and welcomes the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 52/12, on "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform", by consensus.

We look forward to the implementation of the Secretary-General's initiatives pertaining to the field of humanitarian advocacy and coordination. The reform proposals requiring intergovernmental decisions should be dealt with in the near future, including within the framework of the follow-up of the Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56.

Norway would like to highlight some elements in the humanitarian reform programme which we find to be of particular importance.

First, the authority of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, in his capacity as Humanitarian Coordinator, must be recognized and respected within the entire United Nations system. We are now entering the stage of system-wide implementation of agreed conclusions and recommendations.

Secondly, the Office of the Coordinator has been given a renewed opportunity to focus on its core mandate and functions. In this context, we welcome the decision to relieve the Office of all operational activities and allocate these to more appropriate parts of the system.

Thirdly, strong coordination between the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee is crucial. Consequently, the establishment of a joint secretariat is appropriate. Likewise, the secondment of staff to the Coordinator's Office from relevant parts of the United Nations system in order to ensure unified approaches to crisis management deserves our full support.

Fourthly, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs suffered from a chronic lack of sufficient funding. We strongly endorse the objective of including the activities of the Office of the Coordinator in the regular budget of the United Nations. Transitional voluntary funding must be the exception, not the rule.

A fifth point is that United Nations humanitarian activities are not sufficiently monitored and reviewed by Member States. We support the proposal to enhance the role of the Economic and Social Council in this respect and look forward to discussions about possible new monitoring mechanisms to be developed in a longer-term perspective.

The right to receive and to deliver humanitarian assistance is essential in international humanitarian law. This is the fundamental basis for discussions about the security of humanitarian personnel. We welcome and support the European Union initiative to focus on this particular problem under this agenda item. The international community should never accept that parties to a conflict interrupt humanitarian operations through criminal acts directed against humanitarian personnel. Joint efforts to eliminate such a flagrant violation of all humanitarian principles are urgently called for.

Mr. Yuan Shaofu (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): The Chinese delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for the series of reports that he submitted to this session of the General Assembly in connection with agenda item 20, entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance", and wishes to take this opportunity to state its views on some relevant aspects of this item.

The Chinese delegation has always shown great interest in emergency humanitarian relief activities, and attaches great importance to the role played by the United Nations in this field. On the basis of the progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 46/182 over the past six years and of an assessment of the activities of the United Nations in the humanitarian field, the Secretary-General, in his report on United Nations reform in document A/51/950, proposed certain actions and made some recommendations with regard to reform in the area of humanitarian affairs.

The Chinese delegation supports reform measures such as the establishment of an Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator to be headed by an Under-Secretary-General, as well as the strengthening of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the consolidated appeal process. The Chinese delegation believes that such reform will enable the United Nations system to further the implementation of General Assembly resolution 46/182, and to take concerted, expeditious and effective humanitarian action in response to natural disasters and emergencies, in accordance with the guiding principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, bringing into full play the overall strengths of the United Nations in this field.

The Chinese delegation is of the view that the newly-established Emergency Relief Coordinator should focus more on three core functions — namely, policy formulation and coordination, the advocacy of humanitarian issues and the coordination of humanitarian emergency responses — in order to do a better job of implementing General Assembly resolution 46/182. Following the dissolution of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, its former responsibilities should be redistributed within the United Nations system in such a way as to ensure the continued provision of effective humanitarian assistance to disaster-stricken developing countries, to help them to carry out their post-disaster reconstruction and resume their economic development, and to enhance capacity-building in developing countries for disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness in a truly effective manner, so as to minimize the damages caused by various kinds of disasters.

Adequate resources are a prerequisite for providing humanitarian assistance to developing countries and assisting in their recovery and development. Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 46/182, 68 United Nations inter-agency consolidated appeals have been made, resulting in a total of $10.4 billion to be used for assistance against various kinds of disasters. But this amount is far short of meeting the increasing needs of disaster-stricken countries for humanitarian assistance as a result of frequent natural and man-made disasters occurring all over the world. The Chinese delegation holds the view that development funds for disaster prevention and mitigation and for post-disaster reconstruction should not be provided from the limited development resources of other funds and programmes; instead, new sources of funding should be found in order to establish a special fund. Developed countries should make a commitment to contribute to such a fund, for without that the Secretary-General's reform would just be putting old wine in a new bottle, and the reform would lose its meaning.

Mr. Dimitrov (Bulgaria) (*interpretation from French*): On behalf of the delegation of Bulgaria, I would like to raise the question of economic assistance for countries affected by the Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

I take this opportunity to extend our thanks to the Secretary-General for the understanding he has shown and his energetic efforts he has made to find an adequate response to the serious problems that have accumulated over the past few years. The form and content of his report, contained in document A/52/535, allow us to structure our debates in a better way.

The question of the political consequences of the sanctions adopted by the Security Council is extremely important for Bulgaria, which has suffered great losses since the start of the commercial and economic embargo against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The following figures are indicative of the extent of the losses. Before the imposition of sanctions, 75 per cent of Bulgarian exports passed through the territory of our neighbour, which was also one of our main trading partners. For an economy such as Bulgaria's, 80 per cent of whose products are intended for foreign markets, such sanctions were extremely burdensome. We were practically cut off from the European markets, and a heavy blow was dealt to a number of industrial sectors traditionally linked to that region; as a result, the economic and financial situation of the country has been weakened. These negative effects were added to the difficulties already being encountered with the transition to a market economy. When the losses caused by observance of the sanctions against Iraq and Libya are added, the amount of direct and indirect losses is close to that of Bulgaria's external debt. Expert estimates based on a methodology proposed by the United Nations Development Programme mission place that amount at approximately $8 billion.

Unfortunately, even today, when the peace process has started and sanctions are being lifted, their effects are still felt on the socio-economic situation of Bulgaria and other affected countries.

In strictly observing the collective measures imposed by the United Nations, Bulgaria was counting on an equitable distribution of the economic burden within the international community. Bulgaria believes that the international community should demonstrate its political will and establish an effective mechanism for overcoming the losses endured by countries who have strictly complied with the United Nations resolutions.

Over the course of its last four sessions, the United Nations General Assembly has adopted resolutions on granting economic assistance to countries affected by the commercial and economic embargo against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Those resolutions, in Bulgaria's view, attest to the international community's understanding of the problems facing the countries so affected. Unfortunately, the effect of the implementation of those resolutions is far from meeting our expectations and hopes of providing any adequate technological, financial and material assistance to compensate for the losses sustained. There have still been no positive changes with regard to the adoption of measures to create wider opportunities for participation in the post-conflict reconstruction and development of the former Yugoslavia.

I should like to take this opportunity to address international financial institutions, international organizations and Member countries and to appeal to them to take urgent and effective action. We count greatly on the assistance that can be provided by the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and intergovernmental and regional organizations. The radical changes that have taken place in Bulgaria since the accession to power of the new Government are a stable guarantee of the success of joint initiatives. Bulgaria has a satisfactory democratic framework and a national economic strategy that enable it to initiate and carry through substantial projects in such spheres as energy, transport, telecommunications and the environment, among others. Bulgarian businesses can play an active role in the humanitarian assistance organized by the United Nations for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly by furnishing supplies to the international peacekeeping forces.

The United Nations has a number of effective mechanisms that enable it to provide assistance and at the same time offer reliable instruments to respond to the needs that arise. International institutions can open special lines of credit for the implementation of approved projects, several of which concern all of Europe as well as the Middle East. Were they to grant trade preferences, the donor countries would encourage exports. They could also encourage their investors to a greater degree, since the changes brought about in Bulgarian legislation in this field open up new and positive prospects.

The implementation of the collective measures adopted by the United Nations must be based on the principle of equitable distribution of the onerous economic repercussions among all the member countries of the international community that have the necessary capacity. That is what is meant by collective responsibility for decisions taken.

Bulgaria hopes that a new and far more effective approach will be adopted vis-à-vis assistance to its economy to compensate it for the losses it has suffered. It is ready to participate constructively in the discussions under way on all aspects of the problem, with a view to finding the best solution.

Mr. Benítez Sáenz (Uruguay) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I have the honour to make this statement on agenda item 20 (e) on behalf of the countries members of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) — Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay — and the associated States of Bolivia and Chile.

We cannot remain aloof from an item as important as that of humanitarian assistance, and we stress the importance of considering this matter in the General Assembly.

Our countries are fully aware of the increased number of natural disasters that have befallen our planet, and our continent in particular. While mankind has not been able to stave off their inevitable outcome, it has taken the first major step in that direction by working collectively to cope with such situations.

The countries members of MERCOSUR believe that Argentina's proposal to establish a corps of "White Helmets" is an international initiative that could provide the Organization with a vital tool for dealing more effectively with humanitarian emergencies.

This is more than just another new body. It is an efficient and viable mechanism that will be available to the United Nations, with appropriate equipment and technically skilled and trained personnel, with the sole aim of providing immediate assistance in rehabilitation, reconstruction and development in critical emergency situations.

In the MERCOSUR context, the question of "White Helmets" was on the agenda of last year's summit meeting at Fortaleza. On that occasion our countries welcomed the initiative, and today we can say that such joint operations are being carried out in three of our countries and that they are being monitored by national institutions and our respective foreign ministries.

Since then, there have been three missions in the MERCOSUR region in Argentina, at Campo Gallo in Santiago del Estero Province, in Misiones Province and in the areas recently affected by the flooding of the Uruguay River as a result of the well-known El Niño phenomenon in Entre Ríos and Corrientes Provinces.

Missions have also been deployed in Alto Verá in Paraguay and in the Argentine-Brazilian border region around Bernardo de Irigoyen.

Uruguay is studying the possibility of joining the Alto Verá project and is at present selecting volunteers for the implementation of a drinking-water project in Haiti.

In 1997, in response to a request from the Bolivian Government, "White Helmets", together with the World Food Programme and the United Nations Development Programme, carried out a project for the control of Chagas' disease covering 5,000 households in the Department of Tarija.

Countries that suffer the effects of natural disasters will always require speedy and effective action that is apolitical, neutral and impartial and that can only be provided through humanitarian assistance.

As the delegation of Argentina noted in its introduction, we believe that the current reform process in the United Nations that the Secretary-General and his staff are so boldly carrying forward affords á unique opportunity to make in-depth changes in the Organization's humanitarian assistance.

In 1994, when the idea of creating a "White Helmets" corps was put forward, many of the countries that sponsored the initiative at that time sought to share ideas about seeking alternatives to strengthen the response capability and effectiveness of the United Nations in the humanitarian sphere.

The active involvement of more than 40 countries in support of the initiative is most relevant and deserves to be highlighted. This approach of involving States in support of international volunteer services, as proposed in the "White Helmets" initiative, will give new impetus to the participation of international civil society and strengthen and complement the current United Nations system of volunteers.

In addition, the teamwork concept makes the traditional approach to volunteerism more efficient in the conduct of missions, most of which are conducted in situations that pose extremely difficult problems of logistics and of communications with the rest of the world.

The institutional growth of the "White Helmets" initiative shows that it has been accepted conceptually by the international community and that it is now time for national focal points to begin to work more smoothly and rapidly. This is undoubtedly the starting point for strengthening the capacity of the international community to respond to humanitarian emergencies through the coordination of the United Nations.

Before concluding, I would like, on behalf of the entire group, to state our satisfaction at knowing that we have this new humanitarian tool that will enable us in the very near future to provide assistance to victims of natural disasters in our own MERCOSUR countries, as well as in other regions that so require.

We hope that this joint initiative will be seen as a means of making full use of the capacity our countries hold in reserve to provide greater support to the United Nations in its emergency and rehabilitation activities.

Mr. Hynes (Canada) (*interpretation from French*): Last July Canada warmly welcomed the measures proposed by the Secretary-General to strengthen the United Nations humanitarian system. These reforms seek to better focus the capacities of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and his new Office on the three core functions established by the General Assembly six years ago.

We also welcome the appointment of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello to the post of Coordinator. For Canada, the reforms he is to implement must amount to more than a mere reshuffling of previous arrangements. In its recommendations on a wide range of issues the working group of the Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs has established an excellent basis on which to approach this challenge. With his vast experience in the humanitarian and peacekeeping fields, Mr. De Mello should be able to provide the needed leadership.

(spoke in English)

In Canada's view, an important key to the success of the humanitarian reform process will be the establishment of clearer lines of authority and of accountability among those involved in emergency-response decision-making.

The humanitarian agencies, as the ultimate delivery mechanisms for emergency relief, must clearly be engaged in the decision-making process, and thus committed to its results. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has a crucial role to play in this regard. To ensure that it will be effective and action-oriented, Canada believes that the IASC should be kept to a manageable size.

But the essential purpose of the United Nations humanitarian machinery is not to secure broad bureaucratic consensus at any cost. It is, rather, to bring timely and effective relief to victims in times of crisis and conflict. We therefore urge the Emergency Relief Coordinator and all IASC members to agree quickly on the basic criteria for future coordination arrangements. And when it comes to addressing specific emergencies, we will look to all agencies to be flexible and to cooperate fully in responding to requirements identified by the Emergency Relief Coordinator. And, ultimately, when quick consensus cannot be reached on key issues concerning the allocation or the sharing of responsibilities, the Coordinator must have the authority to decide or, where appropriate, to recommend to the Secretary-General clear courses of action.

An important related question is the role of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and its relationship with the IASC and its proposed steering committee. Canada encourages the Secretary-General and the Coordinator to give urgent attention to clarifying the terms of reference for each of these mechanisms and to ensuring their complementarity.

We also hope the Security Council will continue to show a strong interest in humanitarian matters. The Council's March meeting with several non-governmental humanitarian organizations and its May 1997 debate on protection for humanitarian assistance in conflict situations provide valuable precedents on which to build. As stated by the Secretary-General in his report on the work of the Organization, such initiatives hold promise for the development of an integrated approach to conflict resolution, an approach in which the political, military, humanitarian, development and human rights dimensions would be addressed in a mutually reinforcing fashion.

Concerning resources for humanitarian coordination, the new biennium budget proposals being discussed in the Fifth Committee project a continued heavy reliance by the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator on extrabudgetary financing. Resources for actual humanitarian assistance efforts will inevitably continue to be derived primarily from voluntary contributions. But it does not follow that the basic bureaucratic infrastructure contained in the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator should be dependent on, or preoccupied with, a constant search for funds merely to ensure its continued existence and operation. It is therefore our hope that one day we will have an Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator securely and predictably funded in its entirety from the United Nations regular budget.

Allow me to say a few words on one area of activity being divested from the direct responsibility of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. I want to express Canada's profound appreciation for the leadership role the United Nations Secretariat has played since 1988 in setting up programmes for humanitarian demining in many of the countries most affected by the scourge of anti-personnel mines. We hope that in the process of being transferred to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Mine Clearance and Policy Unit will sustain and, indeed, increase its effectiveness. We trust that the Department will give the humanitarian-demining programme the priority attention it warrants, and we hope the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs will continue to contribute to the United Nations leadership in this area.

Finally, it is for Canada, as it is for others who have spoken before us, a matter of grave concern that humanitarian personnel are increasingly being required to perform their duties in environments where they are subject to threats and often deadly force. We urge the new Emergency Relief Coordinator to give this issue serious attention, and we encourage all humanitarian actors to work, in cooperation with the United Nations Security Coordinator, in drawing up recommendations on measures to improve the security of humanitarian personnel.

To conclude, I want to reiterate Canada's appreciation for the humanitarian reform measures introduced by the Secretary-General. The United Nations humanitarian-assistance system plays a crucial, high-profile role in meeting the demands placed on the Organization today. Getting this aspect of reform right will clearly be an important key to ensuring that the entire United Nations reform effort succeeds — and that it is seen by the world to succeed. In their efforts to make this happen, the Secretary-General and the new Emergency Relief Coordinator will have Canada's unqualified support.

Mrs. Mendoza Bilbao (Bolivia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): My delegation fully endorses the statement made on the item under consideration by the Ambassador of Uruguay on behalf of the States members and associates of the Southern Cone Common Market.

The work of the United Nations, in coordination with the various agencies of the system, as well as with international and non-governmental organizations, has been and continues to be commendable in providing humanitarian and disaster relief assistance. The efforts made and the results achieved have been considerable, but they remain far below the desirable levels of providing victims not only with the assistance required at any given time, but also with rehabilitation and full incorporation into the active life of a society. Aware of the link between humanitarian assistance, poverty and development, all those involved in the international community must commit themselves directly to this mission.

We therefore believe that the "White Helmets" Volunteers initiative opens an innovative route to providing effective, efficient and economical humanitarian assistance. It is important to stress the capacity of this mechanism to respond promptly and in a coordinated fashion to natural disaster and emergency situations, while remaining apolitical, neutral and impartial in its humanitarian work. It also calls for a minimum of fixed costs, using existing organizations and the assistance capabilities of participating countries, which provide volunteers and funds for humanitarian activities for emergencies the world over.

Despite its newness, the "White Helmets" initiative has contributed significantly to simple emergency assistance, rehabilitation within the existing programmes of various United Nations agencies and the generation of additional United Nations projects. It has a become a genuine support mechanism for international assistance and mobilization throughout the world.

Bolivia has, from the outset, supported this far-sighted idea of Argentina's. In 1993 and 1994, it carried out an experimental programme at the Bolivian-Argentine border, on the basis of which it decided fully to endorse the "White Helmets" initiative, encouraging concrete activities and allocating special funds to that end. In this context, in 1995, Bolivia established by supreme decree the National Commission for the "White Helmets" Movement, jointly under the Ministry for Sustainable Development and Planning and the Ministry for Health and Social Welfare.

In November 1996, during the official visit to Bolivia of the President of the Argentine Republic, a constitutional agreement was signed, creating the Binational "White Helmets" Commission. This established provisions for both States to observe General Assembly resolution 49/139 B and committed the respective National "White Helmets" Commissions to combat poverty and hunger and to resolve problems of basic sanitation and education. The Binational Commission seeks to provide human-resource training to that end and may call on the help of experts in specific areas.

My delegation wishes once again to reiterate its firm support for the work of the "White Helmets" and appeals to the international community to give extensive support to this mechanism by providing qualified human resources and financial resources to the Special Voluntary Fund of the United Nations Volunteers.

The delegation of Bolivia, committed to the goals of the "White Helmets" Volunteers in activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development, is a sponsor of the draft resolution submitted under this item.

Mr. Guarini (United States of America): The United States Government would like to reiterate its support for the establishment of the new Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. We are pleased that the Secretary-General has moved quickly to name the new Coordinator and that he has selected a person with so much experience in working on and managing multi-agency response to humanitarian crises. My Government looks forward to working closely with Mr. Vieira de Mello. We will be interested to see how Governments can be effectively involved in the policy and decision-making process.

I would like to take this opportunity to urge all agencies to work together with the new Emergency Relief Coordinator. In order for the new office to fulfil its role, it is important that agencies second highly-qualified people from their staff for the senior-management team of the Coordinator's Office.

The United States is the largest government contributor to the voluntarily funded programmes of the United Nations. This increases the value we place on these measures for a more effective, efficient and streamlined humanitarian response to complex emergencies.

We welcome the efforts that organizations are making to systematize their relations with other organizations through memorandums of understanding. These are critical steps towards enhanced coordination and cooperation. In addition to coordination among United Nations agencies, we urge more reaching out to other partners, non-governmental organizations and other international organizations that have a wealth of experience and input to bring to the table.

The coordination of relief and development assistance is on everyone's lips. The word "continuum" is frequently used. My Government believes that, in order to achieve the continuum, coordination should begin early in a crisis, not at the end. A strategic plan and time-frame involving all the agencies which will play a role in a humanitarian situation and its aftermath should be put into place as soon as possible. The catalyst behind this, we believe, should be the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Turning to the specific sub-items, we commend the Government of Argentina for the initiative it has taken in devising and promoting the concept of "White Helmets". My Government is pleased to be able to support "White Helmets" in the field and in the General Assembly.

Let me now say a few words about Chernobyl. The United States recognizes the ongoing effort within the United Nations to address the grave consequences to public health of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. The hardships encountered by the many victims of Chernobyl in Ukraine, Belarus, Russia and elsewhere are of global concern, so it is fitting that the nations of the global community should gather here today in recognition of their continuing plight.

As chair of the G-7 this year, the United States has been involved in an important effort under the G-7/Ukraine Memorandum of Understanding on closing Chernobyl by the year 2000. As part of our support to Ukraine under this Memorandum, the G-7 has commenced an international initiative to stabilize the deteriorating sarcophagus over the destroyed Chernobyl reactor, which has begun to release radiation into the environment. It is time to begin to help Ukraine develop a longer-term solution to this complex and dangerous problem, and at the same time to help the region — and the world, in fact — to find firm and environmentally-sound answers to the lingering question of Chernobyl. It was for these reasons that the G-7 and Ukraine convened the Chernobyl Sarcophagus Pledging Conference — in which many Governments represented here participated — here in New York on 20 November. I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the G-7, to thank all who participated in that Conference, and in particular those who pledged in support of this effort.

The draft resolution before us today is a reaffirmation of our commitment not to forget the victims of Chernobyl. We must indeed continue to work together, as members of the world community who share the global commons, to address the tragic Chernobyl experience and legacy.

Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The delegation of Lebanon would first like to express its appreciation for the important report submitted to us by the Secretary-General on assistance for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon.

(*spoke in English*)

I would like to point out that I am referring to document E/1997/96, which was also supposed to be issued as a General Assembly document. I thank the Secretariat, which has promised to make the document available before the impending adoption of the draft resolution on this agenda item.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

This report highlights the developments in the process of reconstruction and development of the country during the course of the past year and up until the few weeks which preceded the convening of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council in June and July 1997. It also points out the strenuous efforts made by the Lebanese Government in cooperation with international organization donors and the status of the implementation of operational programmes included in the general strategic plan laid down by the Government, under the title of "the plan for the year 2000" which covers the years 1997 through 2002.

It is clear that despite its importance and comprehensive nature the report only sketches a general picture of the trends of the implementation policy of the subjects within the framework of the general strategy on reconstruction and development, along with significant observations thereon. It is not possible to gauge in such a succinct report the development that has taken place or to understand the complexities, difficulties and challenges accompanying the implementation measures. This report must therefore be read with the understanding that it complements numerous other reports drafted by donor organizations in Lebanon, such as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and others, as they dealt with the detailed aspects of the programme components, thereby helping establish a link between strategic topics and the programme components, as stressed in paragraph 21 of the report of the Secretary-General.

In the past few months, Lebanon has received a great number of leading international donor institutions and State officials, including the President of the World Bank, the President of the International Institution of Investments and Guarantees and the Executive Director of UNICEF, among others. Likewise, Lebanese officials paid many visits to other capitals to help enhance international interest, in the process of consolidating civil peace and strengthening reconstruction and development in the country. This active diplomatic movement reflects increasing interest in Lebanon's pioneering and unique experience as a post-conflict peace-building country. Moreover, international interest increasingly emerges through the attention given to it by global mass media, which has expressed admiration for the rise of the phoenix from ashes.

However, we believe that this report has not sufficiently underscored the new philosophy proposed by the Secretary-General and the Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs with regard to the unique nature of the special transitional period experienced by the States which build peace after conflict. In his annual report on the work of the Organization (A/52/1), the Secretary-General considered that post-conflict situations have special requirements and that successful recovery from disturbances caused by conflicts is assisted by facing up quickly to general development challenges, and the provision of appropriate legal frameworks, stable social and political environments and economic opportunities.

Furthermore, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Akashi, recently stressed in his statement before the Second Committee of the General Assembly the need for conflict-solution strategies with a view to coordinating political, humanitarian and development responses on the basis of clear-cut and well-defined principles that ensure a positive link between relief and development. This philosophy lies at the basis of the work of the "White Helmets", as is made clear in the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/52/586.

It would have been possible to view the Lebanese experience as an example of this philosophy, along with requisite encouraging, or even preferential, measures to foster the efforts made and to bring about their success. We should take into consideration that these encouraging measures respond to the principle adopted by donor organizations in preparing their country-development sessions regarding recipient States, with a view to extending additional incentives by increasing the assistance allocated to these States which succeed in implementing their development programmes.

The experience of reconstruction and development in Lebanon underscores the effective impact of international and regional cooperation. It highlights the dynamics of the market system and the effective coordination among basic economic actors in the framework of the system, with the State as the guiding and organizing power, the private sector as the prime catalyst of the capital market and the civil sector as the receiving body which is passively or positively influenced by the programmes.

The success accomplished by the collective national will of the Lebanese people to perpetuate civil peace in their homeland and to reconstruct and develop it has sometimes led us to forget that we rose from the rubble and cast off the negative consequences of a war that lasted for 17 years and destroyed large portions of our cities and villages. We are dealing with the activities of reconstruction as if they were development activities taking place in a country that had enjoyed peace for decades.

This is a good indicator of the positive evolution of reconstruction and development in Lebanon, yet it poses additional challenges that augment the complexities of the exceptional circumstances which Lebanon is now experiencing. We say this because, like the other Member States of the United Nations, Lebanon is called upon to implement whatever was agreed in the various international conferences held in the past seven years under the aegis of the United Nations. This has taken place at a time when international development assistance has dwindled, economic globalization has increased, and the international political and economic rules that affect the trends in national economic activities and their ability to face marginalization and integration into the new world economic order have become intertwined.

The Government's basic concerns remains centred on building the infrastructure which is necessary to activate the economic movement in the country. However, these concerns bifurcate to include all sectors, particularly the repatriation of evacuees, grappling with environmental pollution, reforming the administration, the development of outlying areas, and increasing social and health care and educational programmes. This situation, which combines rehabilitation and reconstruction activities with the need to establish sustainable development in conformity with the outcomes of the

United Nations conferences, necessitates the provision of special economic assistance by the international community. We call upon the international community to provide that assistance.

We have striven to have the national-development session conform with development sessions of various United Nations operational activities, with a view to establishing a link between common themes and programme components within the framework of the public strategy prepared by the Government for reconstruction and development. This is why we have cooperated with a number of main international partners, particularly the World Bank. The Lebanese Government has repeatedly stated its commitment to cooperation and coordination with the representatives of donor States, institutions and the civil and private sectors in the drawing up of operational programmes within the framework of the general strategy and monitoring its implementation and assessing its results. This has been emphasized and commended in all of the periodic reports issued by the relevant international institutions, including the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

One example of this cooperation is the reformulation of the national reports submitted by Lebanon to the various international conferences held under the auspices of the United Nations during this decade. Of course, we face numerous problems and shortcomings affecting the implementation of reconstruction and development programmes. We do not hide this fact. It is conceivable that one of the positive features that helps us bolster these programmes is transparency which governs the economic activities of the country. This feature is one of the components of our democratic system. Thus there is an open discussion, including the mass media, of these problems and how to tackle them. Such discussion enables all sectors of the Lebanese population to express their views and thus enriches the process of finding solutions and implementing them.

We have taken note of the important observations contained in the report of the Secretary-General, particularly those relating to the need to expedite the performance of administrative and legislative bodies to absorb available international resources and to increase human resources which are qualified to respond to the implementation requirements of envisaged programmes.

Yet, one of the basic obstacles to the reconstruction and development process is the stagnation in the peace process in the region. This is due to Israel's intransigent policy, its refusal to implement Security Council resolution 425 (1978), its continued occupation of parts of the Lebanese territories, and its carrying out of near-daily in-depth raids in Lebanese territories. This is in addition to repeated threats voiced by Israeli officials, including the bombardment of infrastructures such as electricity-generating power plants and water-storage facilities, as Israel did in the course of its aggression against Lebanon in April 1996.

We wish to express our gratitude to all donors and to our partners in the process of reconstruction and development, particularly those who participated in the "Friends of Lebanon" Conference, held in Washington on 16 December 1996. By the same token, we hope that international support will continue and be enhanced in order to assist our country to realize its comprehensive programme of reconstruction and development.

Mr. Gorelik (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): Russia attaches great importance to strengthening the United Nations system's capacity to tackle humanitarian crises and other emergencies. For a number of reasons, we were not able to discuss the entire range of problems relating to this coordinating role of the United Nations at last summer's session of the Economic and Social Council, but we hope that this issue will not be put on a back burner and that it will receive thorough consideration during the humanitarian segment of the upcoming substantive session of the Council next year. This should allow us to adopt substantive recommendations aimed at streamlining and strengthening cooperation among all humanitarian partners.

Our delegation attaches great importance to the debate on the July reform package proposed by the Secretary-General, including his proposal to transform the Department of Humanitarian Affairs into the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. We welcome the appointment of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello to the post of Emergency Relief Coordinator and hope he will participate actively in the efforts to solve the complex problems relating to humanitarian operations, preparedness and early warning for emerging humanitarian crises. We expect the Coordinator to focus on the priority areas of the Office's activities — policy issues, coordination and advocacy of humanitarian principles — and also on promoting interaction with the Security Council, including the humanitarian aspects of sanctions. We hope that the New York and Geneva branches of the Office will work closely together in a productive collaboration with humanitarian agencies and all other parties involved in the efforts to deal with emergencies.

Russia takes this opportunity to express its appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Yasushi Akashi, who is retiring now. He made an extraordinary contribution to United Nations efforts in the area of humanitarian response, and we wish him every success in his future endeavours.

I should like now to turn to post-Chernobyl activities. First of all, I would highlight the importance of last May's United Nations inter-agency mission, in which representatives of donor countries and other organizations assessed the needs of the States affected. We also welcome the international seminar on the theme, "Chernobyl and beyond: humanitarian assistance to victims of technological disasters", which was organized last May by Russia with the assistance of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. We attach great importance to these events, which were part of the effort to take practical measures to help the victims. The proposals put forward at those meetings by international experts were in line with the special programme on protecting the people affected up to the year 2000, which was adopted by the Government of the Russian Federation last August.

Russia is grateful to the United Nations for the work of the inter-agency programme of international assistance to Chernobyl-affected areas, and it expects that projects under this programme will become part of the work of the special Coordinator on Chernobyl, who will focus on mobilizing the support of the world community. In this connection, we trust that the special meeting on Chernobyl, to be held here tomorrow, 25 November, will have fruitful results. We urge Member States to participate actively in this meeting.

We are also counting on the support of Member States for the consensus adoption of a draft resolution on the strengthening of international cooperation to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. The draft is sponsored by the three countries affected: Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

We would like to turn now to the humanitarian situation in Tajikistan. Resolution 51/30 J resulted in concrete efforts to mitigate the humanitarian crisis in this neighbouring and friendly country. We welcome also the current donors' conference in Vienna, and we expect it to make an important contribution to dealing with that emergency. Russia is actively involved in the peace settlement and the restoration of normalcy as well as in assisting the affected population. The report of the Secretary-General confirms the urgency of the humanitarian situation, particularly for the most vulnerable groups. It is important that humanitarian agencies continue their work in Tajikistan in 1998.

We are following with great sympathy and genuine interest the recent work on the "White Helmets" initiative. Some achievements have been made, but the initiative, we feel, should be given additional impetus in advancing towards one of its principal original goals: to develop a network of volunteer teams that would respond rapidly to emergency situations. Here we need to utilize not only the capacity of United Nations volunteers but also of that of humanitarian agencies and national rescue teams.

Turning to yet another problem area, we also are concerned about growing threats to and attacks on humanitarian personnel. We believe it important and relevant to address this problem in a General Assembly resolution. All parties involved in conflicts should adhere to the principles governing humanitarian assistance and respect international humanitarian law. Of course, this is more easily said than done, but every effort should be made to protect humanitarian personnel. The Security Council issued a timely reminder of that imperative in its statement of 19 June 1997.

Because there are such a regrettable number of conflict situations, it is important to continue to focus our attention on the continuing crises in the Great Lakes region, in the Horn of Africa, in Angola, and in Africa as a whole. In all these cases, we must take into account not only the symptoms but the causes of the disease: underdevelopment, the struggle for resources and ethnic tensions. These root causes, I would point out, are applicable to all "hot spots".

Mr. Tesfaye (Ethiopia): The agenda item on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance to individual countries in various regions, is of considerable interest to my delegation. Many parts of the world have continued to be afflicted by natural and man-made disasters and emergencies. This combination of man-made and natural disasters has created an enormous demand for United Nations involvement and assistance.

Special programmes of assistance to distressed countries and emergency humanitarian assistance are, indeed, today's greatest challenges to the United Nations and to the international community as a whole. In Ethiopia, as we grapple with the many manifestations of socio-economic underdevelopment, we continue to encounter a multitude of impediments as a result of our limited capacity to cope with very grave adverse exogenous factors.

Notwithstanding the important achievements in our efforts to attain food self-sufficiency over the past several years, the effects of the recent global climatic change known as El Niño have posed a serious challenge. This climatic change is currently affecting the countries of our subregion, resulting in an immense human toll and material destruction, as witnessed in Somalia, where more than 2,000 people have already died and where many more are exposed to an extremely dangerous situation. In Ethiopia as well, the situation has become alarming with the continued unseasonable rainfall, which has led to the destruction of crops in certain parts of the country, thus causing a chronic food shortage. As a result of this, the Ethiopian Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission has appealed to the international community to provide 154,107 metric tons of emergency food assistance for distribution among the affected population. In this connection, my delegation would like to call upon the international community, and in particular the United Nations system, to mobilize support and assistance.

The question of refugees and displaced persons presents yet another humanitarian challenge which needs a more vigorous approach and response. Despite our economic difficulties, Ethiopia continues to host a large number of refugees and to rehabilitate thousands of returnees and displaced persons. The hosting of large numbers of refugees has meant increased exploitation of already scarce resources, and has also had a bearing on the environment as a source of energy, shelter and food. In the light of this, it is our view that the scope of humanitarian assistance should be widened to address such problems encountered by host countries.

It is true that all those problems and others are shared by many developing countries, especially those in Africa. Therefore, while we appreciate all the bilateral and multilateral assistance being extended to us in the many areas of economic and emergency activities, we continue to emphasize the need for greater coordination and integration of the humanitarian response with reconstruction and long-term development to complement our national efforts.

Emergency assistance should not be viewed as a form of support designed to last forever. Economic assistance permitting greater economic advances by creating development-friendly framework conditions and an opportunity for attaining self-sufficiency is of paramount importance. Furthermore, the United Nations agencies dealing with emergencies and development cooperation should be streamlined to ensure efficiency and to use the dwindling resources at their disposal in a more cost-effective manner, focusing on programme activities. In this context, my delegation welcomes the Secretary-General's measures and proposals aimed at reforming the humanitarian activities of the United Nations.

My delegation believes that in undertaking emergency humanitarian activities the inputs of affected countries or regions are pertinent. These activities should in particular make greater use of local know-how in the planning and implementation of programmes and projects. Giving recipient Governments project responsibility and involving local experts would lead to more efficiency, cost-effectiveness and sustainability.

The need for greater commitment to financing multilateral cooperation in emergency humanitarian assistance and to contributing to development is crucial, as inadequate funding renders the successful implementation of projects difficult.

My delegation would like to see the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) strengthen its function as the primary mechanism for interagency coordination under the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator. The IASC should also look into so-called homeless issues such as the question of treatment of internally displaced persons and the problem of the continuum from emergency relief to rehabilitation. Especially on the problem of the continuum from emergency relief to rehabilitation and reconstruction, the United Nations system should plan a comprehensive policy and strategy for the post-emergency period in a given situation, so that the momentum for multilateral cooperation to cope with emergency situations may be sustained and developed through the stage of rehabilitation and reconstruction.

With regard to the development of an emergency information and early-warning system, as stressed in General Assembly resolutions 46/182 and 48/57, Ethiopia takes note of the efforts made so far by various agencies in this field and earnestly hopes that the mechanisms put in place will be further developed so that an improved level of coordination may be achieved.

My delegation believes that policies and strategies related to disasters, whether in terms of emergency response or of preventive measures, need to include a vulnerability analysis of the effects of the environment, the human element and the ecology. The need for vulnerability assessments has become all the more important since such assessments lead to a better understanding of vulnerability to disasters, which in turn helps decision-makers to take appropriate measures to mitigate and overcome them. Furthermore, such assessments, in addition to helping in the planning of appropriate programmes to reduce vulnerability, also provide information which makes it easier to target beneficiaries, to prepare relief plans and to put in place the right preparedness modalities in such a way that they enhance development efforts. But this alone will not yield all the capacities required to tackle the root causes of vulnerability unless it is augmented by the financial, material and technical assistance of our development partners.

In concluding, I wish to emphasize the importance of the work that the United Nations is undertaking to help people in desperate need of the support and assistance of the international community. Behind the statistics of missions conducted, dollars contributed and tons of supplies delivered by the international community, there is the human reality of lives saved, children fed and hopes reborn. Therefore, the important humanitarian mission of this world body, the United Nations, deserves the full support of the international community.

Mr. Mirza (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The delegation of the United Arab Emirates sincerely thanks the Secretary-General for his notes and comprehensive reports on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance. These describe the various humanitarian activities carried out by the United Nations to meet the increasing demand for humanitarian assistance in various parts of the world. We are grateful too for the leading role played by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in this area.

The United Arab Emirates agrees with other speakers about the destructive effects of natural disasters and other emergencies, particularly those that cause great loss of human life, property and State infrastructure, and that have far reaching effects on the social and economic development plans of developing countries, in particular the least-developed countries. Despite United Nations efforts to contain the negative humanitarian effects resulting from several of these disasters, humanitarian needs have not been met to the requisite degree on a wider scale. This is due to the exacerbation of existing crises on the one hand, and the apparent lack of resources on the other hand. This situation required an increase in humanitarian assistance and activation of the relevant United Nations machinery, in particular the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the Central Emergency Revolving Fund.

Furthermore, the need calls for strengthening coordination between the aforementioned and other regional and international development programmes, and first and foremost the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, in order to mobilize economic resources and their generous influx of contributions required for a speedy response to the needs of affected and vulnerable peoples.

The United Arab Emirates is among the leading countries that have worked in earnest, acting upon the instruction of His Excellency Sheikh Zayed ibn Sultan Al-Nuhayyan. It has paid special attention to external humanitarian assistance issues and has provided unparalleled assistance to many developing countries, particularly those which have suffered natural disasters and civil and regional wars.

In confirmation of our commitment to a humanitarian approach based on our authentic Arab customs, civilizational values and the noble precepts of Islamic Shari'a, we have established the Abu Dhabi Development Fund as one of the main channels for providing developing countries with assistance and concessional loans in order to help them in the implementation of their various projects in the fields of education, health, agriculture and other humanitarian services. We have also participated in other funds and financial establishments dealing with development, especially those in developing countries and in the least developed countries. This is not to mention bolstering the role of institutions and charitable organizations, notably the Zayed charitable organization and the Red Crescent, as well as other organizations, aimed at helping them achieve their humanitarian objectives for the purpose of mobilizing local efforts in the public and private sectors, and meeting appeals to meet human needs and emergency demands in parts of the world that have been affected or are impoverished.

Throughout the past few years, successive world events have indicated that disasters — caused by people resorting to armed force in their ethnic, civil, ideological or border wars — have been increasing in a manner unprecedented in modern history. Such crises have been reflected in the exacerbation of many dangerous humanitarian problems, such as displacement, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, ecological deterioration, exposure to chronic diseases and permanent physical deformation of individuals. Therefore, my Delegation, which expresses its concern over the continuation of such issues, supports peaceful, just, permanent and comprehensive solutions to these conflicts on the basis of international legitimacy and the rules of international law. We also support other efforts to establish early warning mechanisms and effective data bases that can contribute to maximizing the capacities for disaster management and a speedy international response to the requirements of sudden emergencies and to the implementation of development projects and reconstruction in affected countries.

The reports on the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories indicate a regression in the economy of the Palestinian people compared with its level before the start of the peace process. This is the inevitable result of the collective economic punishment, and the policy of blockade and starvation pursued by the Israeli Government vis-à-vis the Palestinian people. It is also the result of the stringent restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities and its armed forces, which are equipped with weapons which are most dangerous to humanity, in order to limit the movement of the Palestinian people's sons and goods to and from the cities of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and their suburbs. This is not to mention other unjust practices aimed at preventing or delaying receipt by the Palestinian Authority of international support funds. Such practices have delayed the completion of projects to construct industrial complexes and the opening of the Gaza port and airport. Moreover, the implementation of programmes of international humanitarian agencies concerned with the provision of assistance has been obstructed.

This has precipitated the spread of disease and poverty in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories. It has led to a decrease in production in the Palestinian Authority's areas of more than 60 per cent and to at least a 65 per cent increase in unemployment. This is considered a flagrant and clear violation not only of the peace agreements but also of all relevant resolutions of international legitimacy and of all international humanitarian pacts and norms.

The United Arab Emirates pins great hopes on international development assistance in support of plans for the establishment of national Palestinian institutions and for developing the local technical capacities of the Palestinian people in order to enable it to implement its economic and social development plans with a view to its proper integration into international trade. We reaffirm the importance of bringing international pressure to bear on the Israeli Government to force it immediately to stop its dangerous policies that violate the basic human rights of the Palestinian people. We urge the international community, particularly the donor countries, to meet their obligations in a manner that will help to achieve a better life for the Palestinian people.

Mr. Sharma (India): We thank the Secretary-General for the reports which are under discussion today. They are exhaustive and comprehensive in nature and respond to the importance that the international community attaches to the crucial issue of humanitarian assistance. India also accords the highest importance to the provision of humanitarian assistance to those in need, while respecting fully the guiding principles for such assistance that have been so clearly outlined in section I of the annex to resolution 46/182. These principles are valid and time-tested, and their continued application would contribute towards success in relieving pain and suffering.

We have noted that the Secretary-General has preferred to present a more comprehensive report on the follow-up to resolution 46/182 at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, keeping in view several actions and recommendations that have been proposed, and are being considered by us, for reform of the humanitarian sector of the United Nations. While we await the report of the Secretary-General with great interest, it is essential that the reform process does not lead to a reinterpretation of the guiding principles of humanitarian assistance. These are notably humanity, neutrality and impartiality; full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States; primary importance of the consent of the affected countries and their appeal; and, finally, the primacy of the role of the affected State in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory. My delegation would support all humanitarian activities under the United Nations aegis within these specified parameters.

We would also like to stress that the gravity of humanitarian emergencies should not blur the distinctions between the various United Nations agencies or override the requirements, desires or wishes of sovereign Governments. Clear distinctions need to be made in defining the relationship between functions and imperatives of peacekeeping and peacemaking, and the principles of humanitarian access. The distinction is a fine one, but nevertheless a relevant, crucial and valid one. It was stressed at the last Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Countries in New Delhi in April 1997.

Mr. Enkhsaikhan (Mongolia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We are therefore concerned about the statements that have been made in some of the reports of the Secretary-General, notably document A/52/586, that activities undertaken in response to humanitarian emergencies have extended to areas like conflict prevention and resolution. It has also been indicated that there is a need to explore further the potential contribution of some humanitarian actors in preventive action, particularly in the humanitarian and development fields. Such concepts, which are yet to receive intergovernmental mandates, may further complicate and detract from the task of providing humanitarian assistance to victims of natural disasters and other emergencies.

In the context of international development cooperation, my delegation would caution against detailed and comprehensive reports becoming a mechanism for seeming acceptance of ideas that are still evolving in other forums. I refer specifically to document A/52/532, which in paragraph 43 refers to the inability of the United Nations system in Somalia to avail itself of established institutional mechanisms, such as preparation of a country strategy note. My delegation would like to stress that a country strategy note is, and remains, a voluntary initiative, in the context of the United Nations Development Programme, and is not an essential institutional mechanism.

I would now like to refer briefly to the agenda item on assistance to the Palestinian people. We have noted the efforts of the Special Coordinator, focused on coordination of donor-funded projects, provision of budgetary support to the Palestinian National Authority and strengthening of institution-building programmes. India, despite constraints, has been contributing to the process of assistance to the Palestinian people through scholarships and cultural exchange programmes. More than 50 specialized training slots were offered during the period April 1996 to March 1997, at an estimated cost of 5.5 million rupees. India also pledged $1 million at the Washington donor's Conference in October 1995 and a further $1 million at the subsequent pledging conference in Paris in January 1996. These pledges are being utilized both for provision of goods and for undertaking projects in the Palestinian National Authority territory. India has also offered to set up a common facility centre for imparting training in vocational activities such as software development, computer programming and computerized numerically controlled (CNC) machines.

My delegation has noted, with concern, that while the needs for humanitarian assistance have increased, the response of the donors has not been proportionate or adequate. To cite but one example, we are concerned that for Angola, as against the requirement of $228.48 million for the period January to December 1997, an amount of only $61.89 million, or 28.7 per cent, had been pledged or received in contributions by the end of September 1997. There is a need to ensure provision of adequate financial resources for the implementation of activities related to humanitarian assistance, while at the same time ensuring that such resources are additional to, and not diverted from the already scarce resources for development.

My delegation commends the continued efforts of the United Nations system, despite this uncertain resource position, to bring relief and assistance to those in need in several parts of the world. Its actions have served to underline the predominant and central role of the United Nations in the coordination of humanitarian assistance. We are convinced that the reforms of the United Nations in the humanitarian sector will further enhance its ability to respond to the emerging needs.

Before I conclude, I wish to convey my delegation's deep appreciation and admiration for the dedication and commitment with which many relief and assistance organizations and personnel, United Nations and non-United Nations, are functioning, under the most difficult and trying conditions, in bringing succour to those in need. They often work under daily threats to their own personal safety and security and deserve our unstinted praise.

Mr. Kenik (Belarus) (*interpretation from Russian*): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Belarus, I should like to congratulate Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko on his presidency of this prestigious international forum. As in the past, we have gathered here to discuss further options and measures to provide assistance to the victims of the most devastating technological disaster in the history of humankind. The consistent position of the United Nations with regard to the problem of Chernobyl shows once again that kindness and compassion remain the paramount values of the human race, forging and strengthening mutual understanding and friendship between peoples.

The widely attended international scientific conferences held in 1995 and 1996 in Minsk, Geneva and Vienna were unanimous in concluding that the Chernobyl disaster had devastating consequences both for people's health and for the environment. It was recognized that the long-term consequences of Chernobyl require careful study by scientists throughout the world. The long-term consequences, including genetic consequences, of the constant impact of low doses of radiation over many years have not been sufficiently studied. It will require more than one decade to study their impact on people and on the environment.

Evidence of our inadequate knowledge about the possible radiological consequences of such an accident is provided by the unprecedented increase in thyroid cancer among children in Belarus. That is why the State policy of the Republic of Belarus in mitigating and overcoming the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster is based on the long-term nature of its effects on human health and the state of the environment, and also on the socio-economic development of the affected territories.

The level of socio-psychological tension conditioned by the Chernobyl factor remains high in the polluted territories, but not only there. People still perceive the radiation risk as representing a serious danger to their health.

The problem of how to rehabilitate the affected regions is further complicated by an imbalance in the resident population structure and the serious shortage of qualified personnel, such as doctors, teachers and agricultural specialists. The exodus of such specialists from the area in the first years after the disaster was particularly marked. It is difficult to estimate the economic damage to Belarus caused by the Chernobyl disaster. Some 15 to 20 per cent of our total budget is devoted to dealing with its consequences every year. This is a huge burden, adding to the difficulties of implementing economic reforms.

General Assembly resolution 50/134, which was adopted by consensus, provided a political basis for revitalizing the bilateral and multilateral cooperation among donor countries, specialized agencies of the United Nations system and the States that suffered from the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.

We deeply appreciate the work of the United Nations in coordinating international cooperation to deal with the consequences of the disaster, but at the same time we must note that the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/134 has been rather slow. In recent years, international assistance to affected States has substantially decreased, basically due to a lack of resources.

However, in this connection we would like to express our appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Akashi for his work in preparing for and carrying out the United Nations needs-assessment mission to the three affected countries in May this year. The result of that mission was an objective and unbiased assessment of the post-Chernobyl situation, which was reflected in the United Nations inter-agency programme of international assistance to the affected areas. Basically, that programme can be seen as a strategy for international Chernobyl cooperation in the second decade following the disaster. Tomorrow, 25 November, here at the United Nations, a conference of donors to strengthen the Chernobyl sarcophagus will take place, just a few days after the International Chernobyl Shelter Pledging Conference for Governments. These two events show how multifaceted the Chernobyl problems are and how active the United Nations has been in this area. They also demonstrate that the Organization is committed to the long-term study, mitigation and minimization of the consequences of the disaster. We trust that tomorrow's conference will yield positive results.

The areas affected present the following problems: the need for new jobs, the need to develop the infrastructure and the need for more investment in their economies.

As part of the new strategy for cooperation with donor countries, Belarus is willing to consider the question of new forms of cooperation: favourable terms for long-term credit, provision of equipment for specific purposes with extended terms for repayment and joint enterprises, as well as the possibility of providing tax relief to donor countries and special economic zones and the granting of concessions.

We are very grateful to all the countries and organizations that have provided technical and humanitarian assistance.

International assistance in dealing with the consequences of Chernobyl must be seen as a prerequisite for the countries involved to move ahead to sustainable development. One effective way of lending assistance in times of major disaster is to provide help that will lead to self-help, and this involves intensive socio-economic and ecological rehabilitation of the affected regions. Such an approach is fully in accordance with the models for sustainable development.

The representative of Ukraine, on behalf of the three affected countries, has introduced a draft resolution on strengthening international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

The Republic of Belarus believes that the draft resolution reflects the right approach to solving the problems through international cooperation. Its adoption will create the necessary conditions for implementing the inter-agency programme of international assistance to affected areas.

It is quite clear that this process requires the coordinating role of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. The Department should develop a procedure for interaction between the United Nations system and the donor countries, the affected countries and non-governmental organizations using new forms of cooperation, including humanitarian and technical assistance, mutually beneficial economic cooperation in the regions affected by the disaster and a determination of procedures for choosing the best kinds of joint projects for providing assistance.

Only the Department of Humanitarian Affairs can properly coordinate international cooperation on the Chernobyl issue. It can help enhance the effectiveness of projects carried out by the specialized agencies and assist in streamlining procedures for actually choosing which projects to proceed with. Such an approach will mean a better division of labour among the specialized agencies of the United Nations and those responsible for actually carrying out the work.

We also feel that we should restore the earlier regulation which was used by the Quadripartite Ministerial-level Committee for Coordination on Chernobyl and the inter-agency assessment mission and that separate meetings should be held twice a year.

The Chernobyl disaster was indeed a terrible warning to the human race. Chernobyl made us understand that the earth is our common home — a truly beautiful speck of life and reason in the depths of the universe that has become extremely fragile in the hands of the human race, which has mastered the secret of the atom. The international community can now fully understand that it is only by working together against man-made and natural disasters that we can achieve a united world for the benefit of future generations.

Mr. Ayoub (Iraq) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: There is no doubt that the role of the United Nations and its specialized agencies is constantly growing in the provision and coordination of humanitarian and emergency assistance to refugees and countries that are victims of man-made and natural disasters.

The reports before us clearly set out the role that the United Nations has played and continues to play in this field in various places, such as Angola, Madagascar, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the countries of Central Africa, Lebanon, El Salvador, Djibouti, Tajikistan, the Sudan, Somalia and other countries.

Nonetheless, my delegation believes that the United Nations and the international community currently deal with the refugee problem in terms of its symptoms, not its deep-rooted causes and that is why this problem remains chronic and thus the considerable efforts and energies expended by the international community are wasted. We must therefore concentrate our efforts on the causes, such as poverty, armed conflicts, economic sanctions, economic imbalances, ethnic conflicts, environmental problems, desertification, deforestation, inadequate international cooperation and, above all, the problems of indebtedness, technology transfers, the provision of international financial aid to developing countries and the exploitation of basic resources and unfair terms of trade, all of which lead to greater flows of refugees across international borders, as the current international situation shows.

In this respect, my delegation notes that the High Commissioner for Refugees designates as refugees people who have left their countries because they are being persecuted for political reasons, or because of the insecurity and instability that prevail in their native lands. However, we do not think this definition reflects the actual situation for it does not take into account refugees who, due to the deterioration of economic conditions, are compelled to leave their countries to seek better living conditions for themselves and their families. With regard to strengthening the role of the United Nations in this area, we believe that our Organization can make an effective contribution to resolving this problem, within its responsibilities for maintaining international peace and security, if it takes the following measures.

First, we need to generate and develop international solidarity and cooperation to prevent or limit conflicts, as they can lead to population displacement. Similarly, reconciliation should be fostered wherever possible, particularly in post-conflict situations, as part of continued efforts to find solutions.

Secondly, we have to emphasize neutrality and avoid the politicization of problems and generalizations when granting financial or humanitarian assistance to try to find humanitarian solutions, whether this is done directly, on the basis of governmental initiatives, or through humanitarian organizations.

Thirdly, the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Protocols should provide the legal framework for granting such international humanitarian assistance.

Fourthly, humanitarian assistance should be placed within the context of long-term development assistance, while taking due account of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States, and they should be consulted once it has been decided that assistance will be provided.

Fifthly, the United Nations must adopt an agenda for humanitarian assistance, just as it did with regard to peace and development.

Sixthly, consideration should be given to reforming the Security Council in a way that affirms the international character of the United Nations, in particular for the developing countries, and improving the Council's working methods to avoid abuse and promote the cause of international peace and security.

Seventhly, with regard to conflicts, we should place the emphasis on conflict prevention and try to find peaceful solutions to conflicts through measures that promote peace, such as development, justice and the democratization of international relations, and avoid adopting coercive measures, such as those set out in Chapter VII of the Charter. Such measures should be used only in very exceptional cases once all other options have been exhausted, including those based on regional arrangements or geographical considerations. If certain coercive measures, such as those set out in Chapter VII, have to be used, we must first make sure that the United Nations will not be used to further the foreign policy goals of some influential members of the Council. In this regard, I must emphasize the harmful effects of economic sanctions on displaced persons or refugees.

Once sanctions have been imposed, it is necessary to ensure respect for the principles decided on by the Sub-group on Sanctions of the Working Group of the General Assembly on "An Agenda for Peace". It is also necessary to ensure that the sanctions are in keeping with the Charter; that their objectives and the conditions for lifting them are clear; and that they do not cause humanitarian problems for the population as a whole. The country targeted by sanctions should know exactly what it must do for them to be lifted. Foodstuffs and medicines, along with agricultural and educational equipment, should not be restricted.

My country, Iraq, as the rest of the world is aware, has had an extremely bitter experience as a result of economic sanctions. The maintenance of the economic blockade has led to a shortage of foodstuffs and medicines and a decline in the living conditions of all Iraqis. Some of our people have had to leave the country and seek refuge elsewhere to improve their living conditions, hoping to return once sanctions have been lifted and living conditions have improved.

In the north of the country, conflicts between armed groups are being encouraged by certain Powers that are intervening directly by unilaterally imposing, outside the framework of the United Nations, no-fly zones, another reason for a mass exodus of Iraqi refugees to other countries. The ideal way to end their ordeal would be for other countries, including certain neighbouring countries, to stop interfering in the region's internal affairs. That would enable the State to play its role of ensuring security and stability, thus encouraging the refugees to return, knowing they will be safe.

Finally, through you, Sir, I would call on the international community and the United Nations to step up their efforts to lift the unjust economic embargo imposed on our country, so that it can create a suitable economic and social environment which will encourage the return of all the refugees who have been forced by the embargo to leave their country and families. We also call on the Organization to provide Iraq with development assistance to rebuild its infrastructure, which was totally destroyed during the 1991 military aggression and by the embargo that, under all kinds of pretexts, continues to weigh heavily on us.

The Acting President: I would ask speakers to make statements at a pace that allows the interpreters to follow and interpret.

Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I should like to make an announcement concerning this agenda item, on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance.

I should like to remind delegations that, in view of the large number of draft resolutions expected under this item and the possible need to hold consultations on them with a view to reaching consensus, and as we are already approaching the end of November, members are strongly urged to submit those draft resolutions within the next few days, but not later than Monday, 1 December. I repeat that the deadline for submission of draft resolutions on this item is Monday, 1 December.

Mr. Alimov (Tajikistan) (*interpretation from Russian*): The recent review of the humanitarian reaction capacity of the United Nations system was urgently needed. It will help us introduce essential changes to increase the effectiveness of assistance provided under United Nations auspices in emergency situations. We hope that on the basis of the Secretary-General's proposals we will be able to work productively and take a significant decision on these issues at the next session of the General Assembly.

This issue is not simply academic; it is of the greatest practical significance for our country in particular, in particular, in view of the situation in Tajikistan since mid-1992. Despite considerable difficulties, our Government has done, and is doing, everything possible to deal with the humanitarian crisis which has enveloped the country as a result of internal conflict. However, these efforts would have fallen short but for the help given by outside friends and sympathizers. We are very grateful to all donors, including Governments, humanitarian agencies within the United Nations system, other international organizations and the many non-governmental organizations, charity and individual citizens. Their assistance helped mitigate the humanitarian situation resulting from the devastation, physical suffering and other ills that go hand in hand with civil strife and armed opposition.

We are grateful for the General Assembly's adoption on 5 May 1997 of resolution 51/30 J, which reflected the increased attention given by the international community to the trials and deprivations of the population of Tajikistan. The appeal, drafted jointly by United Nations organizations and institutions, dealing with the humanitarian needs of the Tajik population, made it possible to set clear priorities and determine how much outside help was urgently needed. On the whole, we were pleased with how donors reacted.

Our delegation has prepared, and will be presenting, a similar draft resolution on the question of humanitarian assistance to Tajikistan. We trust that it will receive a positive response and will be adopted at this session.

We would note in particular that the Government of Tajikistan has been moving forward to carry out the fundamental task on the agenda, namely, to restore peace and normalcy to our country as quickly as possible. On 27 June 1997, after three years of difficult and intensive negotiations, we were able to sign in Moscow the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan, which established a transitional period of 12 to 18 months for the implementation of all its provisions, including such issues as amnesty, mutual forgiveness, repatriation, reintegration of refugees, demobilization and reintegration of opposition fighters, the reform of government structures and various other legal and political issues.

We trust that the international community will not stand aside from our troubles but will continue to provide effective and targeted support as we seek to achieve our goals. Despite the importance of the General Agreement and the overall significantly improved situation with respect to compliance with the truce and the ceasefire, the humanitarian situation in our country is still difficult, as can be seen from the report of the Secretary-General in document A/52/500.

The food situation is of particular concern. According to estimates by the United Nations and others involved in humanitarian work in Tajikistan, this year the number of those requiring emergency food assistance exceeded 900,000, or one out of every six citizens, primarily old people, women and children.

Thanks to efforts by the World Food Programme, and also to donors such as the European Union, the International Committee of the Red Cross and a number of countries and non-governmental organizations, on the whole we have been able to meet the minimum food needs of our people. However, next year, given the difficulties facing our national agricultural sector and the food sector as a whole, we will still need international food aid. The same applies to the vulnerable groups in our population. They will still need medicine, health services and other basic services, including restoration of the infrastructure, sanitation and the water supply.

We therefore welcome the Secretary-General's initiative of preparing an inter-agency appeal for humanitarian assistance to Tajikistan in 1998. We need emergency assistance, as well as help in rebuilding and rehabilitation. That is the only way in which we can come closer to lasting peace and ensure a fairly normal situation and economic development.

We are also hopeful about the donors' conference on Tajikistan currently taking place in Vienna with broad participation. We must rely on the understanding and solidarity of the international community for an appropriate response to the humanitarian needs of our country.

Our country shares the pain and suffering of other States where, as a result of conflict, natural disaster and other emergency situations, the people have the same dramatic needs as our own, and are forced to turn to the other peoples of the world for assistance and support. Great humanitarian efforts are being made by the United Nations in the Middle East, the Great Lakes region, Angola, Somalia, Djibouti, the Horn of Africa and the countries of Central America. We believe that we must also strengthen measures to ensure the security of humanitarian personnel working in the territories of those countries, with their consent.

We support the efforts made by various donors, and the ongoing coordination function of the United Nations with regard to international assistance in the post-Chernobyl period. We welcome the steps taken by the Secretary-General for new projects to rehabilitate the people and mitigate the consequences of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.

We would hope that the lofty humanitarian mission of the United Nations will continue to be regarded as one of the top priorities of our Organization, and that it will be supported by all those who are not indifferent to human suffering and pain.

Mr. Awaad (Egypt) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Egypt's statement under this agenda item will focus on sub-item (d), "Assistance to the Palestinian people". In this context, I would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for the report contained in document A/52/159.

I am saying nothing new when I tell the Assembly about the assistance and support which the brotherly Palestinian people is receiving from the Government and people of Egypt. The Madrid Peace Conference of 1991 and the Oslo Accords of 1993, as well as subsequent accords, were important stages in the struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination. Egypt had to make whatever contribution it could to increase the ability of the Palestinian brothers to run their internal affairs and improve their economic situation, so as to benefit that brotherly people, which has suffered, and is still suffering, from the tyranny of occupation and all its collateral effects.

The need for that assistance and support remains urgent amid the current difficult circumstances faced by the Palestinian people of the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, in view of the stagnation of the peace process and Israeli coercive measures, including closures and restrictions on the movement of workers and commodities to and from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip which represent an additional burden increasing the suffering of the Palestinian people.

After the election of the Palestinian Authority, Egypt was quick to extend the necessary support to enable it to discharge its responsibilities. A national committee from all ministries of Egypt was established to specify the manner in which each would provide the appropriate assistance to the fledgling autonomous rule in Palestine. As a result, a number of agreements were signed with the Palestinian Authority, such as the agreements on postal service, transportation and education. A number of other agreements were also signed with a view to establishing institutional linkages between the organs of the fledgling Palestinian Authority and their Egyptian counterparts, which practically meant facilitation from the side of Egypt in the fields relating to the agreements which were signed.

Moreover, Egypt has also trained a large number of Palestinian police cadres who have constituted the nucleus of a Palestinian police force that is carrying out its national task with strict discipline and efficiency. Similarly, Egypt has lent its expertise to the officials selected by the Palestinian Authority to speak on its behalf abroad and to defend the Palestinian cause in all States and international forums. Egypt is also attempting to join with other parties in any form of tripartite cooperation to lend technical assistance to Palestinians in all areas. In this regard, I would refer to the agreement between Egypt, Norway and the Palestinian Authority to train personnel in the nursing profession with a view to rectifying the shortage which the Palestinian National Authority faces in this field. Egypt is also cooperating with the Palestinian Authority in planning and implementing the construction of the port at Gaza with a view to its becoming an important commercial link for the Palestinian people with the outside world.

In another context, and at the level of the private sector, Egyptian businessmen have not held back initiating a number of economic projects with their Palestinian counterparts designed to enhance the efficiency of the Palestinian economy and save it from the consequences of the destructive closures imposed on it at random by Israel. Egypt's role is not confined to the extension of moral and material support and assistance in kind. Egypt is also exerting every effort and through all means to urge all friendly States to increase their assistance and to abide by their commitments to the Palestinian National Authority in order that the Palestinian leadership will be able to realize the aspirations of the Palestinian people, who have suffered so long the scourges of war, displacement and repression. It is high time for the Palestinian people to harvest the fruits of peace.

In this connection, I should like to commend the important role played by the United Nations, the Secretary-General and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as all specialized agencies and organs in providing the necessary support to the Palestinian people. We commend specifically the role played by the Special Coordinator. We hereby, and within this framework, call for increased coordination among all United Nations and international organs, donor countries and the Palestinian Authority. All these entities have affirmed, in all symposiums and conferences held on the provision of economic assistance to the Palestinian people, renewed willingness to enhance their support to the Palestinian Authority on the basis of specific priorities to implement necessary development activities.

In this connection, we salute the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), particularly the initiatives taken by its High Commissioner, whether directly or within the international framework provided by the Agency to channel economic and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people.

Egypt hopes that, with the assistance and contributions provided by all of us, the Palestinian people will take their first steps towards economic and social development. Egypt appeals to the world's States to fulfil their commitments to extend assistance. Similarly, we call upon those States that have not yet extended assistance in this respect to consider doing so, and generously, in order to realize that noble objective of serving peace in the entire Middle East and of benefitting a people trying valiantly to establish its State on its own territory.

Mr. Bull (Liberia): At the outset, my delegation wishes to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (A/52/678) of 13 November 1997 on the post-conflict humanitarian situation in Liberia and the efforts that are being undertaken by the Government of Liberia, in collaboration with the United Nations, regional and subregional organizations and intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies, to move the country along the continuum of normalcy, assistance, recovery and development.

Our commendation also goes to Mr. Yasushi Akashi, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and his able staff for their coordination of relief and humanitarian activities in Liberia. Since Mr. Akashi is to retire shortly, my delegation wishes to join previous speakers in paying a deserved tribute to him for his leadership and outstanding contribution to the work of the Organization. We wish him well in his future undertakings.

After seven years of civil conflict, Liberia faces the formidable challenge of rebuilding its infrastructure and reviving its economy. The Government is also concerned about several hundred thousand of its nationals who remain as refugees in neighbouring countries awaiting repatriation. The internally displaced require resettlement, and ex-combatants, including a significant number of child soldiers, must be rehabilitated so as to become productive members of civil society.

The successful holding of presidential and legislative elections on 19 July 1997 has renewed the hope of the Liberian people that the unfavourable effects of the war will soon be addressed. A duly elected civilian Government under the leadership of President Charles

Ghankay Taylor has formulated and is striving to implement pragmatic policies to promote national reconciliation and unity, economic revival and durable peace. The Government believes that the full participation of all Liberians is a necessary condition for the achievement of economic recovery and political stability.

It has identified those sectors that require priority attention, such as food and nutrition, electricity and water supply, and health and sanitation. Revitalization of the subsistence agricultural sector, from which about 70 per cent of the population derives its livelihood, is also a focal point in the recovery process.

As regards its national economic plan, the Government has maintained a free-enterprise system and is encouraging development of the private sector as one of the primary vehicles for economic growth. In the public sector, it has emphasized fiscal discipline, public accountability and transparency in the management of resources. Since the installation of the new Government, revenue collection in the country has steadily improved. Teams from both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have made several visits to Liberia, and we are encouraged by their initial assessment. It is my Government's hope that favourable consideration will be given to its request that some of its external debts be forgiven.

In order to sustain a culture of peace in Liberia, as well as to meet the difficult challenges of reconstruction and development, the Government has requested the Secretary-General to establish a United Nations peace-building support office in Liberia. The Government notes with deep appreciation that the Secretary-General has accepted its request and is moving as expeditiously as possible to establish this important office in the country.

My delegation wishes to thank the international community and donor Governments for the sustained humanitarian assistance provided to Liberia during its civil war. As the transition is made from relief to the resumption of normal development activities, it is necessary that Liberia be provided continued assistance in order to help consolidate peace in the country.

It is against this background that the African Group — through its Chairman, the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Lesotho — has submitted a draft resolution entitled "Assistance for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Liberia". That draft resolution requests the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to mobilize all possible assistance within the United Nations system to help the Government of Liberia in its reconstruction and development, as well as to undertake as soon as possible, in collaboration with the Government of Liberia, an overall assessment of needs, with the objective of holding a donors' conference for the reconstruction and development of Liberia. It is my delegation's hope that the draft resolution will be unanimously adopted by the General Assembly and that all friendly Governments will participate in the forthcoming donors' conference, which will be held in Geneva in February of next year.

Finally, my delegation is in agreement with the Secretary-General's assessment that the humanitarian situation in Liberia has substantially improved following the installation of a constitutionally elected Government. However, much remains to be done in order to ensure durable peace, stability and development in Liberia. While reaffirming my Government's commitment to meet the needs and aspirations of its people, I, and my country, hope that we can continue to rely on the support of the international community.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and resolution 43/177 of 15 December 1988, I now call on the Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Jilani (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express, on behalf of my delegation, our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his report contained in document A/52/159. We would also would like to express our deep gratitude for the efforts of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, Mr. Chinmaya Gharekhan, and for the key role played by the Office of the Special Coordinator in facilitating and coordinating the activities of the United Nations institutions through effective action in the field.

The Palestinian people deeply appreciate the efforts of the international community to help them succeed in their struggle and to face the new challenge confronting them as they work to build their country and its institutions under the current difficult conditions. Similarly, we would like to express our deep appreciation to the international community for the initiatives it has undertaken to save the peace process and to achieve tangible progress at all levels. Such progress would have a positive impact on the economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people.

In this context, we would like to express our gratitude to all the States and organizations that provide assistance to the Palestinian people. It is our great hope to see the international community honour its commitments to help the Palestinian people restore their economy, which has been destroyed, and to lessen the impact of Israeli policies on the living conditions of our people.

The basic message that emerges from the Secretary-General's report that we have before us is that the infrastructures of all the vital sectors have been destroyed. Indeed, the occupation authorities have completely neglected them for three decades. The occupation authorities continue to collect exorbitant taxes from the Palestinian people and to plunder their natural resources, yet, according to the report, from 1970 to 1992 they spent $15 per inhabitant for infrastructure in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as opposed to $1,500 per Israeli inhabitant — which is 100 times more. And we have not even mentioned the policies and measures imposed by the Israeli Government since 1993.

These truths are reflected in the Secretary-General's report contained in document A/ES-10/6, which was submitted in accordance with resolution ES-10/2 of the General Assembly. Allow me to quote the following paragraph:

> "The realization of the principle of territorial integrity, as enunciated in the Oslo accords, has been frustrated during the period under review by Israeli restrictions on the movement of persons and goods between so-called A, B, and C areas of the West Bank, between Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and between the occupied territories and the outside world. Safe passage arrangements have not been established, and arrangements for a Gaza seaport and airport have not been agreed upon. The Israeli policy of general closure, which has been in effect since 30 March 1993, imposes explicit restrictions on the mobility of goods and persons. There are fixed Israeli checkpoints on Palestinian roads, including key transport routes, and a system of differentiated mandatory permits for labourers, business people, medical personnel and patients, students, religious worshippers, and all other categories of Palestinians. Restrictions on entry to Jerusalem block access to the main north-south transportation route in the West Bank, necessitating lengthy and costly detours. This general closure has been aggravated by periodic comprehensive closures entailing the complete denial of such movements during a full 353 calendar days between 30 March 1993 and mid-June 1997." [A/ES-10/6, para. 22]

The report goes on to say in the same paragraph:

> "Israeli restrictions on the movement of goods and personnel are also imposed on United Nations officials and project materials, resulting in delays and added costs for development projects in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and in serious disruption of the work of humanitarian agencies." [*ibid.*]

These extremely serious policies and practices not only violate the agreements reached; they also reflect the Israeli Government's policy of vengeance on and collective and arbitrary punishment of the Palestinian people. Such policies and practices cannot be justified by security concerns. The international community has already condemned them. Economic and living conditions in the Palestinian territories are continually deteriorating. Indeed, the economy's performance has worsened, the average Palestinian income has fallen significantly and unemployment has reached a very high level. This, in turn, aggravates the economic and political problems.

These deteriorating living conditions and the frustration with the peace process arising from the new Israeli Government's policies have made it almost impossible to discuss cooperation or the peace process. On several occasions, we have warned the Israeli Government immediately to abandon its policy of collective reprisals, closures, blockades and unjust restrictions. We must give up any hope of successful regional cooperation and economic cooperation conferences so long as the Palestinian economy is being destroyed and the peace process undermined. The failure of the most recent conference on economic cooperation speaks eloquently in that respect.

Israel's respect for agreements reached and for their implementation, its abidance by international law, and an end to its policy of blockade and collective reprisals are all *sine qua non* conditions for saving the peace process, ensuring its success and alleviating the suffering and improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 45/6 of 16 October 1990, I now call on the observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mrs. Junot (International Committee of the Red Cross) (*interpretation from French*): In recent years, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has closely followed the debate on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance and welcomes this renewed opportunity to share a few thoughts on this topic. We are convinced that strengthening coordination among the various humanitarian organizations, both in field operations and in the conceptual approach to them, is essential if they are fully to achieve their objectives.

The ICRC is particularly concerned with emergency situations arising from armed conflict and internal violence, which are often marked by widespread and urgent needs among the civilian population and by the breakdown of political, economic and civic institutions. Such situations require humanitarian organizations to harmonize their responses and avoid any duplication of efforts. Coordination should aim at carefully orchestrating the conduct of different types of activity, over time and in a frequently volatile and rapidly changing environment. It should be instrumental in broadening the impact of humanitarian efforts and in ensuring the best use of donor funding.

The ICRC believes that humanitarian action, on which the fate of many thousands of people often depends, requires proper assessment and planning, professional management and constant evaluation. Humanitarian organizations involved in emergency response therefore need to recognize their interdependence. Inappropriate behaviour or lack of professionalism on the part of some can adversely affect the efforts undertaken by others. It can, moreover, lead to a dangerous lowering of standards in humanitarian aid.

In this connection, we shall refer briefly to the issue of security of humanitarian workers. The growing risks to which humanitarian organizations have been exposed in recent years are undoubtedly due to changing realities in the pattern and conduct of warfare. These risks have been further compounded by the proliferation of aid agencies with divergent objectives and different working methods. Warring parties often view the humanitarian world as a whole, without distinguishing between the various organizations; in other words, if one agency offends them, all may be affected by the consequences. The security of all the organizations thus depends on the security of each. Proper coordination and compliance with common fundamental principles can undoubtedly help to improve the safety of humanitarian personnel.

Here, we should like to highlight the importance of codes of conduct and terms of reference which seek to regulate the way in which humanitarian operations are carried out, specify the conditions attached to the provision of relief and establish minimum standards that ought to be universally applied. In 1993, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement adopted a code of conduct which has since been endorsed by over 100 non-governmental organizations and which was welcomed by consensus by the representatives of 142 Governments at the most recent International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. This code is one attempt to set universal, practical and professional standards in emergency operations and to address the issues of ethics and accountability.

The ICRC wishes to stress its full commitment to take part in United Nations coordination efforts. It recognizes the need to strengthen appropriate United Nations-led coordination mechanisms, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Its participation in these mechanisms is, on the one hand, prompted by its concern to achieve the greatest possible complementarity between its own efforts and those of the United Nations and humanitarian organizations; and, on the other, conditioned by its determination to fulfil its special role as an independent and neutral intermediary in situations of armed conflict, which is enshrined in the Geneva Conventions.

Apart from its contribution to the work of United Nations coordination mechanisms, the ICRC has also been pursuing a bilateral dialogue with United Nations agencies and bodies, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as some of the major non-governmental organizations involved in emergency situations or humanitarian advocacy. The objective of this dialogue is to enhance mutual understanding and strengthen sectoral coordination and cooperation.

For many years, the ICRC has played a major role in coordinating humanitarian endeavours in the field. It did so, for example, in Cambodia in the early 1980s together with UNICEF, in Somalia in the early 1990s, and more recently in the Russian Federation, in Chechnya, until the brutal murder of six of its field personnel — mostly medical staff from national Red Cross Societies — forced it to withdraw last December. The ICRC currently plays a leading role in conflict areas — in Afghanistan and Sierra Leone, for instance — and in the domain of protection and emergency relief for internally displaced persons in Colombia and Sri Lanka.

The ICRC is willing to assume field coordination responsibilities, and is prepared to do so, on a pragmatic and voluntary basis and without prejudice to its specific mandate, particularly in places where it is de facto the main humanitarian organization in place. The ICRC already coordinates the relief efforts of national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and their Federation in conflict situations, pursuant to the statutes of the movement. In all its operations the ICRC attempts to reach victims of the conflict on all sides, with the consent of the parties involved.

We should also point out that in some countries, such as Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Afghanistan, national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies play an invaluable role, particularly in strengthening local mechanisms for coping with emergencies. Furthermore, in a transition period such as we are currently experiencing in the former Yugoslavia, national Societies from other countries are increasingly involved in achieving the ICRC's goals by implementing rehabilitation projects.

Besides recognizing the need to strengthen coordination between aid agencies, the ICRC considers it essential to further enhance consultation and cooperation between humanitarian organizations and political bodies. Such interaction should lead to a more precise division of tasks and responsibilities between the humanitarian organizations that are working to alleviate human suffering and the political entities whose primary duty it is to tackle the root causes of conflict and to restore conditions for peace and stability.

The ICRC finds it encouraging that over the past few years humanitarian issues have been given greater prominence on the agendas of political bodies such as the United Nations Security Council, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Non-Aligned Movement. This is clearly reflected in the increasing openness of these bodies and their interest in direct interaction with humanitarian organizations.

Despite the constructive dialogue which has taken place in many forums and brought together humanitarian and political bodies, the ICRC notes with growing concern that there is a tendency, particularly in Central Africa, to resort to humanitarian action as a substitute for political and military action. But let us be quite clear on this point: when violence, as the expression of a deliberate policy, reaches such a pitch that the survival of entire populations is at stake, the response to crises cannot be limited to humanitarian action. Massacres and genocide, which are above all political crimes, can be effectively combated only through political and, if necessary, military action.

Therefore, ICRC can only hope that States and the United Nations will not concentrate on humanitarian action alone in certain areas of the world, while neglecting political responses to conflicts. It is convinced that humanitarian action should complement, rather than replace, political action and, where needed, peace-keeping or peace-enforcement operations.

If the provision of humanitarian aid becomes, or is perceived to be, conditional on the behaviour of warring parties, or if it is entirely linked to political objectives, that will lead to situations in which some victims "deserve" protection and assistance more than others. For the ICRC this would of course be intolerable, calling into question the very essence of its humanitarian approach.

Furthermore, if humanitarian aid is used to promote foreign policy objectives, it may become a contributory factor in increasing the vulnerability of representatives of humanitarian organizations. The security of personnel depends, to some extent at least, on the way in which combatants perceive humanitarian action. In practical terms, if combatants see a humanitarian organization as a factor likely to influence the course of the conflict, or if they view it as a symbol of what they are fighting against, they may try to harm it in some way, and its personnel thus become easy targets.

The ICRC is convinced that humanitarian agencies and political leaders should engage even more than in the past in a regular and far-reaching dialogue. It is therefore paying increasing attention to its interaction with regional and global political bodies, and recognizes the need to be proactive in matters involving humanitarian diplomacy. In this connection, we should like to mention the ICRC's convening of a humanitarian forum in Wolfsberg, Switzerland, to examine the growing challenges in this field. Some 70 high-level representatives of donor Governments and humanitarian organizations participated. The forum was a follow-up to the humanitarian summit organized by the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) in Madrid in December 1995. The ICRC intends to pursue this dialogue and convene a similar forum next year.

We should also like to mention that, at the invitation of the Belgian Government, an international symposium focusing on the relationship between humanitarian action and political-military action is scheduled to take place in Brussels in February 1998.

Another important event will be the first periodic meeting on international humanitarian law which the Swiss Government, as the depositary of the Geneva Conventions, is convening in January 1998. The meeting will essentially deal with armed conflicts linked to the disintegration of State structures and the issue of respect for and protection of humanitarian personnel.

The response to the challenges ahead will depend on the international community's ability and will to find comprehensive solutions to humanitarian problems. Such solutions must incorporate the political, social and economic elements without which humanitarian aid can accomplish little of lasting value.

Mr. Pedersen (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies welcomes again the opportunity to share a few observations on this important agenda item on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance.

At the heart of the coordination debate is, in our opinion, a concern for the quality and effectiveness with which we in the international community respond to the suffering of those caught up in catastrophe and conflict. In this respect, we applaud the proposal of the Secretary-General for the new Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator within the United Nations system, which recognizes not only the need for more pragmatic coordination among operating United Nations bodies but also the equally vital need for coordination between policy development, crisis response and diplomacy. We believe the plans for the new Office demonstrate an understanding that humanitarian efforts which deal with the consequences of crisis are no substitute for political action to address its causes and cessation. In this context, the International Federation is keen to see a strong role continue for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as one of the few forums that brings together United Nations and non-United Nations humanitarian agencies.

Within the disaster-response community, the concern for quality of response is growing fast and generating a number of exciting practical endeavours. Three years ago, the Federation, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and some international non-governmental organizations, launched the code of conduct for relief agencies and workers. This is a 10-point code of behaviour which seeks to safeguard the independence of agencies and to ensure that their motivation is humanitarian rather than political or commercial. It talks about a relationship between aid workers and beneficiaries which respects human dignity and local capacities. It emphasizes the need for transparency in our dealings and accountability to our supporters.

The code has now been endorsed by some 131 international non-governmental organizations, including all of the major agencies commonly seen operating in today's complex emergencies. At the most recent International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference in 1995, 147 Governments welcomed the code and pledged their support to making it work. Tangible evidence of this support can now be seen in many donor countries, where the code is being used as a yardstick against which to judge agency suitability for funding and competence of implementation. Host Governments are starting to use it as a way of ensuring the quality of agencies entering their country, either directly or by encouraging in-country, non-governmental organization coordinating bodies to use it. It is becoming an accepted standard. Agencies are expected to behave in this way, and their peers, the media and their donors are starting to question behaviour which does not come up to this standard — proof, we think, that self-policing and steady pushing for high standards achieves results where quick-fix solutions and imposed regulations fail.

In an exciting new development, the International Federation, non-governmental organizations, church agencies and the ICRC — which between them are the end-point deliverers of some 95 per cent of international humanitarian assistance — have come together to develop a second-generation code which will lay down minimal performance criteria for independent agencies and will define, for the first time, both a universal best practice for agencies and the quantity and quality of assistance disaster victims have a right to expect from assistance agencies. This work, dubbed the "Sphere project", supported by United Nations operational agencies and funded by non-governmental organizations and donor Governments, aims to produce an international set of field-applicable standards by the middle of next year. We believe that this major initiative marks a key turning point in the quality of both the accountability and service that independent agencies are committed to giving, and will make a significant contribution to coordination among such agencies.

Coordination is not an issue only within the humanitarian community. More than 11 years ago, the explosion in reactor number 4 at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant created a new category of disaster. Dealing with that disaster — which we are still dealing with today — requires a new form of cooperation. A large number of people have been affected, sometimes in neighbouring countries, and the enormous economic impact will for decades place a burden on the affected communities. In addition to the now-past acute emergency needs, long-term health consequences are starting to appear. Because of their scope and magnitude, such disasters require an innovative and multi-disciplinary approach — hence the need for close cooperation and coordination between the various technical, scientific and humanitarian agencies involved. Long-term commitment of donors is needed, and the Federation actively lobbies for this. Throughout the process, from relief to rehabilitation, the Federation is committed to keeping humanitarian needs on the agenda as well as advocating economic and technical solutions.

We believe that the most effective way to ensure the success of such a programme is to involve the affected communities in both its planning and development. In this regard, the Federation is advocating an increasing mobilization of local resources, as external support will, we are fully aware, progressively phase out.

If we move to a more recent crisis, the joint International Federation-North Korean Red Cross relief operation demonstrates the effectiveness of coordination between independent humanitarian organizations and the value of promoting understanding and cooperation between independent organizations and affected national Governments. Our relief operation, which began in the autumn of 1995, entered a new phase as of July of this year, when it was expanded to provide health and nutritional support to some 2.6 million people in the country. The current operation provides food aid to the most vulnerable people and assistance to the country's failing health sector. The latter is a role which will grow as other agencies, notably the World Food Programme, become more active in the food sector.

On the other side of the world, our operations in the Great Lakes area of Africa demonstrate the value of a regional approach, linking local Red Cross societies in the region and linking relief to disaster preparedness and community development. The enormous population movements following the 1994 Rwanda massacres have deeply affected all countries in the Great Lakes region, either by forcing them to care for hundreds of thousands of refugees or by fuelling existing conflicts.

The National Societies of the Great Lakes countries, with the support of their Federation, have made tremendous efforts to support their local communities and authorities in coping with this crisis. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Tanzania, Red Cross Societies have taken care of hundreds of thousands of refugees in the Goma, Bukavu and Ngara camps. In Rwanda, a rebuilt National Society gives support to large groups of fellow citizens who have managed to escape death during the massacres. In Uganda, the National Society assists Rwandan refugees. From the beginning, the Societies of the region and the Federation had committed themselves to continue their support beyond the emergency situation.

In conclusion, for the Federation, our modus operandi is always to provide assistance through our local membership, using the opportunity of relief programmes to upgrade skills, pass on knowledge and promote a concern for issues of development and conflict mitigation. Better and more universal standards in assistance, the exploring of new relationships between independent agencies and Governments, and close cooperation with United Nations organizations are all of vital concern to us.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision taken earlier at this meeting, I call now on the observer of Switzerland.

Mr. Staehelin (Switzerland) (*interpretation from French*): The Swiss delegation is grateful for this opportunity to address the item on the coordination of humanitarian activities, a matter to which my Government attaches great importance.

I wish first to express our satisfaction at the recent appointment of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello as United

Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, an excellent choice by which the Secretary-General is sending a very clear signal to the international community about the importance he attaches to the new Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Switzerland believes that humanitarian coordination should be a priority for the new Coordinator's Office, and in that connection we should like to draw attention to four points. First, humanitarian coordination involves two elements: the Emergency Relief Coordinator has the duty to meet the coordination needs both of the international humanitarian community and of field operations, and he must also ensure optimal coordination within the United Nations system by taking into account the political, military and development aspects of humanitarian activities. The structure of the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator will have to reflect the need to carry out these two tasks with a view to ensuring the optimal functioning of humanitarian coordination.

Secondly, the machinery for the dissemination of information and for decision-making in the area of humanitarian coordination must operate as effectively as possible. The Secretary-General's decision to strengthen the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as the main consultative — and, we hope, decision-making — body is certainly a major step in that direction. But we fear that centralizing activities in the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator could create too wide a gap between the machinery for the dissemination of information and for decision-making on the one hand and the main humanitarian agencies operating in Europe on the other. Here, it is essential to ensure that the future structure makes the best possible use of the respective advantages of each of the United Nations headquarters sites. Specifically, we must maintain the complementarity and coherence between New York's responsibility for political and military affairs and Geneva's responsibility for interagency operational questions in the humanitarian sphere. The same is true for the process of consolidated interagency appeals for funds.

Thirdly, in keeping with the logic of reform of the humanitarian sector, the transfer to the United Nations Development Programme of responsibility for training in disaster prevention and management should include only the operational aspects of these responsibilities. The actual coordination of the management of disaster response should remain among the functions of the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, in accordance with resolution 48/162. We consider that, for reasons of efficiency and with a view to achieving synergy, these functions should remain close to the agencies and organizations with the operational mandates for humanitarian protection and relief, especially the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and the large number of relevant non-governmental organizations.

Finally, we think that the Secretary-General's recommendation that a humanitarian-affairs segment be established within the Economic and Social Council is a first, positive step towards better "governance" in the humanitarian sphere. For its part, Switzerland is interested in participating in future discussions on the modalities of such a segment and indeed in participating in a governance body such as that suggested by the Secretary-General.

I wish now to mention a problem that concerns us all: the precarious security situation of humanitarian personnel in the field. The increasing number of serious incidents, even deliberate attacks aimed at humanitarian personnel, is intolerable. In our view, the international community must consider the best way to promote the safety of those who are committed to helping those who are most in need. As the depositary of the Geneva Conventions, Switzerland feels it bears a special responsibility with respect to the implementation of international humanitarian law. Thus, it gladly accepted the mandate of the twenty-sixth International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent to organize periodic meetings to consider general problems of implementing international humanitarian law, and is pleased that the safety of humanitarian personnel will be a principal item on the agenda of the first of these meetings. We hope that all the States parties to the Geneva Conventions will participate actively in the meeting, which will be held at Geneva in January 1998.

I wish in conclusion to reaffirm the support of Switzerland for the Secretary-General's recent decisions in the humanitarian sphere, and for the new Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, with which we expect to work very productively.

The Acting President: Action on the draft resolutions already submitted under this item, and on those to be submitted, will be taken at a later date to be announced.

The meeting rose at 7.10 p.m.

United Nations A/52/PV.54

General Assembly
Fifty-second Session

Official Records

54th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 25 November 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Udovenko . . . . (Ukraine)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Ngo Quang Xuan (Viet Nam), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 24

Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal

Draft resolution (A/52/L.23/Rev.1)

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of Japan to introduce draft resolution A/52/L.23/Rev.1.

Ms. Kotani (Japan): My name is Mikako Kotani. As a member of the Japanese team, I have taken part in two Olympic Games — in Seoul in 1988 and in Barcelona in 1992 — and I won two medals in synchronized swimming. I am also a member of the International Olympic Committee's Athletes Commission. Today I am pleased and honoured to represent Japan at the General Assembly and to take part in its consideration of agenda item 24, "Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal".

For today's debate, Japan, together with many co-sponsoring Member States, has submitted a draft resolution calling for the observance of the Olympic Truce during the XVIIIth Olympic Winter Games, to be held in Nagano, Japan, from 7 to 22 February 1998.

I would like first to express my deep gratitude to Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch, President of the International Olympic Committee, for his initiative in calling for the Olympic Truce, and to the representatives of United Nations Member States for supporting that initiative since 1993.

I do not believe that the only objective of sports is to break records. The balanced development of both the mind and the body is also an objective of sports. Fair competition, in a spirit of sportsmanship, fosters mutual respect that excludes discrimination of all kinds, including that based on race, religion, gender or nationality, and serves to deepen mutual goodwill. This, in turn, can lead us to the gradual realization of peace and understanding — goals shared by all humankind.

The Olympic Games are the world's greatest celebration of sports. The five Olympic rings represent the five continents and symbolize the strong bonds of friendship and solidarity that are created through the Olympic Ideal among the youth of the world. Coming together at the Olympic Games, the athletes who compete with their skill and strength deepen their mutual understanding and goodwill, and appreciate the significance of world peace.

In ancient Greece peace was highly valued, since all hostilities ceased during the games that took place in Olympia. Participating athletes were assured safe passage, even through enemy lands, thanks to the Olympic Truce, known as *ekecheria*.

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

It was this Ideal of the ancient Olympics that Baron Pierre de Coubertin of France sought to revive in the modern Olympic movement. Today, more than a century after the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896, we carry on that Ideal — the aspiration for peace.

Needless to say, this Ideal will prevail during the forthcoming Olympic Winter Games in Nagano, which will promote respect for the beauty and bounty of nature and celebrate peace and goodwill as ideals for the twenty-first century.

These Games are the second Olympic Winter Games to be held in Asia, following those in Sapporo in 1972. It is my firm conviction that the Olympic Winter Games in Nagano will provide a venue for a broad exchange among young people from all over the world, and will contribute to making this a better and more peaceful world.

In 74 days the last Olympic Winter Games of this century will begin. On this occasion, let us renew our determination to ensure that in the coming twenty-first century the people of the world will practise tolerance and live in peace, as stated in the Preamble to the United Nations Charter.

With this in mind, I propose here today that we resolve to observe the Olympic Truce during the period of the XVIIIth Olympic Winter Games next February, and to urge the peaceful settlement of international conflicts in conformity with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and the ideal embodied in the Olympic Truce. I sincerely hope that the draft resolution will be adopted unanimously.

In addition to the 159 Member States listed in document A/52/L.23/Rev.1, the following 17 countries have joined in sponsoring the draft resolution: Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Cuba, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Iraq, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein, Palau, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Viet Nam.

The Acting President: I should like to wish the representative of Japan and her team more medals at the XVIIIth Olympic Winter Games to be held in Nagano in February 1998.

Mr. Zacharakis (Greece): It is a great honour for me to speak before the General Assembly on this agenda item, entitled "Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal". It is equally an honour for my delegation to sponsor, together with so many other Member States, the draft resolution on this agenda item, contained in document A/52/L.23/Rev.1, so ably introduced by the representative of Japan.

On 7 November 1995 the General Assembly at its fiftieth session adopted by consensus resolution 50/13, by which it called upon Member States to reaffirm the observance of the Olympic Truce, or *ekecheria*, as it was known during Greek antiquity, every four years during the Summer and Winter Games. That resolution reflects the historic, solemn appeal addressed by the President of the General Assembly to all States to observe the Olympic Truce during the Games of the XXVI Olympiad, to strive towards building lasting peace, whether or not they happened to be parties to a confrontation, and to focus their thoughts and actions on the principles and ideals to which the *ekecheria* and the Olympic Movement seek to propagate. Most important, however, is the appeal addressed to those presently engaged in armed conflicts to uphold this principle, and to suspend all hostilities, in keeping with its observance.

The *ekecheria* has been living in the hearts of the Greek people for more than 30 centuries. It is an ancient tradition of my country, according to which all conflicts ceased during the period of the Truce, beginning seven days prior to the opening of the Olympic Games and ending on the seventh day following the closing of the Games, with the aim of providing athletes, artists, their relatives, pilgrims and the public safe passage to and from Olympia.

The implementation of the principle of the *ekecheria* by the world community could herald the beginning of a new era which will, hopefully, lead to the gradual disappearance of the immense human tragedies caused by the plague of war.

It is equally important to note that Alexander the Great, having recognized the importance of both the Olympic spirit and Ideal, advocated that the ancient city of Olympia, the birthplace of the Olympic Games, should be regarded as the capital of all Greeks. In his historic campaign, this great man was happy to see materialize his vision of spreading Greek civilization, together with the Olympic Ideal, to the extreme limits of the ancient world. It was within this spiritual framework that Alexander the Great built stadiums and organized athletic games in almost all the places he led his humanistic campaign. He put special emphasis on promoting his idea that every person should share the virtues of perfection of the body, generosity of spirit and kindness of the soul, as well as the values of noble emulation and individual distinction emanating from fair and honest victory.

The Olympic Ideal has been in the past and remains in our time an everlasting source of inspiration and hope for humanity. It expresses the very essence of the will to compete, with peaceful means, to achieve peaceful goals and attain victory through individual effort and the harmonious exercise of both body and mind. It is more than clear that it never meant exterminating or — even worse — humiliating the opponent.

In the spirit of Olympic ethics, any form of discrimination — racial, religious, political, linguistic or otherwise — is totally excluded, and the fundamental principle of equality prevails.

During the last three millenniums the Greek people have remained wholeheartedly and deeply committed to the Olympic Ideal, founded on the noble principles of understanding, tolerance, solidarity and dignity. The observance of these principles takes a particular dimension, especially in our time, when the world is suffering from heinous evils, such as armed conflicts at the national and regional level, genocide, ethnic cleansing, violence, terrorism, crime and drugs, which are directly connected to the complex and acute problems of hunger, poverty, misery, unemployment and, last but not least, clear, gross and uncorrected violations of human rights. Through the Olympic Truce and the Olympic Ideal, fresh steps can be made towards the promotion of human rights, constructive dialogue, reconciliation and the search for durable and just solutions to contemporary problems. These solutions must aim primarily at the elimination of all kinds of human suffering, the advancement of friendship between peoples, cooperation and equality among nations, and the strengthening and maintenance of peace on a universal scale.

The internationally recognized symbol of the five interlocking rings clearly signifies the union and the fraternity of the five continents, whose athletes represent every single people of the globe.

The Greek delegation would like to pay tribute to the International Olympic Committee, one of the most important non- governmental organizations, for all its arduous endeavours, performed on a worldwide scale, to promote constantly, in all possible fields and at all levels, the Olympic Ideal, with the sole aim of achieving through them protection of the environment, the advancement of social progress and the maintenance of peace.

We would like, in particular, to express our appreciation to the International Olympic Committee for its initiative to conclude the mutually beneficial cooperation agreements between itself and the relevant organs, organizations, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, especially the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Environment Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the World Health Organization.

We feel that all Member States should try their best to encourage this cooperation, because it is our strong conviction that through athleticism an important impetus is given to a large variety of activities, since sports have become an important component of modern culture and because athleticism is an important element which encourages peoples to abstain from recourse to violence, enabling them, at the same time, to use their knowledge and experience to understand themselves and others.

Greece, which is ready to host the Olympic Games in 2004, transmits a strong appeal to the youth of the world, without any discrimination, to take part in the Games, which, at the very beginning of the third millennium, we are confident will give a new thrust to the fundamental principles and concepts of friendship, solidarity, understanding and fair play.

In conclusion, my delegation would like, once again, to reiterate that the Olympic Ideal remains an endless source of hope and inspiration which will carry the torch with the Olympic flame to present and future generations for a better, more human and peaceful world.

Mr. Zackheos (Cyprus): I would like at the outset to express my pleasure over the great number of countries that have sponsored the draft resolution, which shows the importance that the international community attaches to the Olympic Ideal.

The great challenge now is to take the first practical steps towards turning into reality the observance of the Olympic Truce, or *ekecheria*, during the Summer and Winter Olympics, beginning with the Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan.

The Olympic Truce is an expression of the yearning of mankind for peace, understanding and reconciliation, and for the noble notion of distinction, based on honest competition. In the search for excellence, every athlete is equal and victory is the result of ability, training, hard work and perseverance. Discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, sex or otherwise is incompatible with the Olympic spirit.

It is important to strengthen adherence to Olympic ethics, and especially to conduct the Games in a fair way. In this context, the efforts against the use of prohibited anabolic steroids and other drugs are to be commended.

Cyprus, a small country, has since its independence followed an active foreign policy based on the principles of international law and the United Nations Charter, which coincide fully with and adhere to the Olympic Ideal.

The latest manifestation of our determination to become a bridge of peace in our sensitive region in the eastern Mediterranean, and a homeland of harmony and understanding for all communities living on the island, is the proposal of President Clerides for the demilitarization of Cyprus. On this solemn occasion, we renew our appeal for the acceptance of this proposal so that Cyprus will be able to participate in the next Olympics as a reunited, happy and peaceful State.

The people of Cyprus felt immense satisfaction at the decision of the International Olympic Committee concerning the hosting of the Olympic Games of 2004 in Greece, birthplace of the Olympic Movement. We interpret this decision as an appeal for a new beginning and an expression of mankind's collective will to make the twenty-first century a period of serious efforts towards peace, the advancement of social progress and prosperity. The twentieth century, which is approaching its end, has seen two world wars, ideological antagonisms, regional and local conflicts and the policy of "ethnic cleansing". It is hoped that human rights and respect for international law will be the norm in the new millennium.

I would like, in conclusion, to express our appreciation for the great efforts of the International Olympic Committee in imbuing youth with these ideals, which will guarantee a better and more humane world.

Mr. Boisson (Monaco) (*interpretation from French*): Our Assembly is about to adopt for the third time a draft resolution on building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic Ideal. This text has just been very eloquently introduced by the representative of Japan, Ms. Mikako Kotani, an outstanding athlete and Olympic champion. We are very grateful to her.

In this draft resolution, the General Assembly would urge Member States to observe the Olympic Truce during the XVIII Olympic Winter Games, to be held in Nagano, Japan, next February. This is a sincere, straightforward appeal to hostile parties, whoever they may be, to suspend or cease all fighting before, during and after the Games.

Since this item was included in our agenda in 1993, at the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly, a solemn appeal to respect the Greek tradition of *ekecheria*, or Olympic Truce, has been regularly made in connection with the Olympic Winter and Summer Games.

The tradition of this truce goes back to the first Olympiad in ancient Greece, when Iphitos, King of Elis, concluded with Lycurgus of Sparta an agreement establishing on the territory where the games were to be held a sacred truce, the *ekecheria*, which was respected by all, conscientiously and with conviction.

At that same forty-eighth session, in 1993, the General Assembly, following the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, adopted resolution 48/10, in connection with the centenary of the International Olympic Committee, declaring 1994 the International Year of Sport and the Olympic Ideal.

This Ideal, symbolized by the Olympic Charter, is a philosophy of life that exalts and brings together in a harmonious and balanced whole all the qualities of the body, the will and the spirit.

Allying sport with culture and education, the Olympic Ideal seeks to inspire a way of life based on respect for the fundamental, universal ethical principles of solidarity and non-violence.

The goal of the Olympic Ideal is to place sport everywhere in the service of the harmonious development of mankind in order to encourage the establishment of a peaceful society that seeks to preserve human dignity.

Above and beyond this appeal, which has now become a tradition, my delegation wishes equally and unreservedly to encourage cooperation between the International Olympic Committee and the United Nations system as a whole, particularly in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance, protection of the environment, promotion of health and education, which are the common areas of activity of two organizations.

The International Olympic Committee has made such cooperation one of its primary objectives. Since it was created more than 100 years ago, it has been trying to develop Olympic sports activities as a way of actively teaching the young people of the world's various countries about international understanding and harmony, without prejudices of any kind.

In this respect, the decision of the International Olympic Committee to fly the United Nations flag at all sites of Olympic Competition is highly symbolic.

We are too often surrounded by violence. To combat it, education remains the best tool. It is our duty to instil in our children the values of respect and tolerance for others. The practice of sport can and must contribute to this and must be promoted as a means of fostering understanding, solidarity, friendship and ethics. The International Olympic Committee and the National Olympic Committees are doing their utmost in this respect, and we commend them most sincerely for that.

The Head of the delegation of Monaco to the General Assembly, His Serene Highness Crown Prince Albert, who is also Chairman of Monaco's Olympic Committee and a member of the International Olympic Committee, attaches the greatest importance to this fundamental mission that the two institutions share. Monaco's co-sponsorship of the draft resolution submitted today for the approval of the States Members of the United Nations is another expression of our commitment to this cause.

By adopting the draft resolution on building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic Ideal, the General Assembly would be strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and the international Olympic Movement, as well as placing it within an ongoing, long-term process highlighted every four years by the Summer and Winter Olympic Games.

The broad support for the draft resolution and the large number of sponsors are very encouraging. We must try to show that the draft resolution's message is not just one of symbolic hope, but is rather the expression of the desire for peace of a world community that is strong and united in the face of the hateful violence of combat and ceaseless armed conflict.

Therefore, together with all the Governments that are sponsoring this draft resolutions, we wish to express our firm and determined hope that the Olympic Truce will be respected during the Olympic Winter Games in Japan early next year.

Mr. Wahid (Maldives): The United Nations was created for peace. Whenever there is a call for peace, we must join hands, for sport is a good vehicle for promoting peace.

My delegation believes that team sport characterizes two basic traits of humans: competitiveness and cooperation. We cooperate as a team and compete with other teams. This is the spirit of sports.

The International Olympic Committee is the highest sporting body, whose ideals closely resemble those of the United Nations. Both promote peace and understanding among nations and peoples. Therefore, we urge closer cooperation between these two institutions.

Observing the Olympic Truce is an area of cooperation which serves the cause of peace. Maldives regards the Olympic Truce as an important symbol of peace. Its origin, which dates back to the ninth century B.C., when it was sworn to cease hostilities, clearly illustrates this. The United Nations recognized this when the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session urged Member States to observe the Olympic Truce. My delegation is happy that the General Assembly is about to adopt this year a draft resolution calling for Member States to observe the Olympic Truce during the forthcoming Olympic Winter Games in Japan. Maldives, as a sponsor of the draft resolution, calls upon all Members to support it.

Maldives is not known or heard of in most international sports events. Given its size, small population and financial constraints, this is unavoidable. However, Maldives attaches great importance to sports. We believe that sports should play an important role in the lives of children, youth and even the elderly. However, given the large percentage of youth — 32 per cent — in its population, a substantial proportion of the available resources, however meagre, are used for the sports activities of youth. This has enabled our fine young men and women to participate in regional sports activities as well as in some international sporting events, including the most recent Atlanta Olympics 1996.

Maldives is not the only country with difficulties in participating in international sports. Small States with small populations and limited resources have the disadvantage of being unable to participate in the competitive world of sports.

Let sport, which is recreational and which teaches discipline, be equally used as a vehicle to foster peace and understanding throughout the world. Let us pledge ourselves not to limit the Olympic Truce to the cessation of hostilities during the Games themselves. Let us make it a way of life.

Mr. Filippi Balestra (San Marino): I take the floor today to make my country's contribution to the debate on the draft resolution entitled "Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic Ideal". This agenda item is particularly important to us. In fact, San Marino has been a sponsor of the draft resolution on this matter for years, and we would like to share the wisdom and value of its concept.

San Marino has always tried to reiterate and defend the importance of ideals and principles. Perhaps it is because of them that my country, the oldest functioning republic in the world, has been able to preserve its sovereignty and independence for 15 centuries.

Another ancient republic established the Olympic Games. They were traditionally organized to stimulate healthy competition among countries and to promote peace and fair play. The draft resolution would seem to be of only symbolic value, but it acquires substantial importance if we consider the strong influence that sport can have on individuals, and in particular on young people.

The Olympic Games have always been a moment of unity among peoples, a synonym for overcoming all diversities and making space for tolerance and fair play. Moreover, the Games represent a unique opportunity for the exchange of experience among young athletes from different cultures, and if different cultures can coexist in sports competition they can certainly coexist in real life. Conflict may exist, but violence is not necessary.

Certainly, the Olympic Games do not suffice to eliminate major armed conflicts that affect the world, but they can represent an important moment of reflection that we cannot and should not renounce. Thus, my country associates itself with the many other sponsors in transmitting this important message every four years that conflicts should be suspended during the duration of the Games. This is a heritage we should respect and should be proud of.

I am sure that all countries represented in this forum will look with favour on this draft resolution and will take the appropriate steps to implement it fully. We are confident that the draft resolution will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Richardson (United States of America): My delegation wishes to thank Miss Mikako Kotani, Olympic silver medallist for synchronized swimming, Barcelona 1992, for serving as torch-bearer on this agenda item. It is my delegation's pleasure, as host country of the most recent Games in the Olympiad and as host for the Winter Olympic Games in 2002, to be a sponsor of today's draft resolution, "Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic Ideal".

The Olympic Ideal goes beyond victories and records to fair play, friendship and, ultimately, peace. The Olympic Ideal promotes international understanding among the youth of the world through sport and culture. It goes beyond sports competition to embrace intercultural and humanitarian activities as well.

Sports are truly global activities that extend into the lives of all people, whether they are rich or poor, at peace or at war. International competitions such as the Olympic Games encourage nations to set aside their differences in the spirit of fair play, and they provide everyone with a venue for cultural exchange and an opportunity to share national traditions and customs.

As a baseball player who was drafted to play professionally earlier in my life, I was particularly proud when my sport, known as the "Great American Pastime," was included as an Olympic event in 1984. Just for the record, I did not make it as a professional baseball player.

Whether athletes or spectators, when we meet at international sporting events we share in the glow of world-class competition, in the heartbreak of losing, in the glory of winning, but most important, in the goodwill of participation.

That is why the sponsors of today's draft resolution urge all to reaffirm observance of the Olympic Truce, the ancient tradition calling for all hostilities to cease during Olympic Games. Since 1993 this biennial resolution has been the most co-sponsored in General Assembly history.

Today our goal is to continue sending its strong message of peace and international goodwill to the youth of the world. The International Olympic Committee's decision to fly the United Nations flag at future Games will serve as a reminder of this Assembly's resolution in support of international peace and stability for billions of athletes and spectators around the world.

In 1894 Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the International Olympic Committee, predicted that the new, modern Olympics would eventually become both a symbol and the center piece of a new global era of unity among nations. While that vision has yet to become a reality, today's reaffirmation of the Olympic Truce by the General Assembly will recommit the nations of the world to that global aspiration.

Mr. Barout (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Successive events in history and the lives of peoples since time immemorial have shown that sport plays a pioneering role in enriching the cultures of the world and in expressing their special characteristics, and that it contributes directly to promoting relations and strengthening ties between societies and communities in matters of culture and the environment and all other areas of human activity.

The needs of the young are not limited to food, education and financial and technological security. They equally need to develop a physical awareness and a sports culture, so as to channel and sublimate their inherent talents and creativity and their boundless energy. Sport can also be a means of establishing human and humanitarian values and of cultural enrichment, in harmony with the principles of peaceful coexistence, participation, democracy and respect for human rights.

The United Arab Emirates has faith in the philosophy of sport, as principles founded on tolerance, brotherhood and solidarity, as advocated by the International Olympic Committee. We therefore call for the harmonious improvement of the well-being of humanity through sports programmes that encourage participation and understanding between young people at the international level, particularly through the strengthening of activities aimed at combating activities and phenomena that our societies reject, such as violence, terrorism and drug trafficking. That responds to the need for world peace and security, and allows for the protection of social and economic structures and their development in a sustainable manner, so as to create a better world for its peoples through sport and the Olympic principles.

We also support all the proposals on the necessary measures to ensure observance of the Olympic Truce during the Olympic Games, in particular the Games to take place from 7 to 22 February 1998 at Nagano, Japan, Games which will be a bridge to the twenty-first century. We urge all States to cooperate by respecting this Truce, using peaceful means to resolve their conflicts and differences, in accordance with the principles of the Charter and international law. We also urge them to institute national projects and programmes to meet the demand of international public opinion for promotion of the spirit of brotherhood, tolerance and love; rejection of violence; collective responsibility for guaranteeing fundamental human rights for all, regardless of nationality, race, or religious or ethnic affiliation; and allowing peoples to live in peace and stability.

Being convinced of the role of sport in individual development and in enriching society in general, the Emirates have attached particular importance to the organization and promotion of this sector, and have given great attention to youth and the development of the talents of young athletes. In doing so, we have taken into account global developments and respected noble principles and moral values. This prompted us to establish a national Olympic committee, to supervise national activities in this area and to improve training and refereeing so as best to meet our goal of improving the training of young people in various sports. Since young people are both building blocks for the future and the wealth of today, the Emirates have created a sports city, Zaied, an integrated, well-equipped complex which promotes all varieties and disciplines of sport and culture. Like countries where sports have already been successfully promoted, we have allocated generous funds to encourage and equip clubs and stadiums, thus permitting participation in most sports at regional and international competitions. In addition, there are scientific and cultural seminars, conferences and other events relating to the subject of sport for young people.

To maintain our strong links with our past and our true Arab and Islamic heritage, faithful to our ancestors and their sporting activities, we have responded to the interests of our people by promoting horse races, camel races and water sports. In doing so, we have played a leading world role in these fields. We have also established federations for horsemanship and camel racing in Arab countries, and have sponsored prizes in kind and in cash for the leading competitors at the seasonal and annual races. We have thus underscored our willingness to preserve this traditional sport, which is valued both at the official level and by the people, not only in the Emirates but elsewhere throughout the world.

Finally, my country welcomes the international efforts to advance cooperation in the joint activities of the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee, particularly those that encourage development, humanitarian assistance and environmental protection, as well as the improvement of education and health. The United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization all take part in this work. We reiterate the importance of furthering these efforts by encouraging the organization of large-scale sports competitions; exchanging information and experience between organizations; and rationalizing programmes for management, training, refereeing and the promotion of regulated sports events. This should be done at all levels and for all ages, given the great contribution that sport can make at the global level to the achievement of development and well-being for all societies.

Mr. Fulci (Italy): The General Assembly first considered this item at its forty-eighth session, when it proclaimed the centenary of the modern Olympics, 1994, as the International Year of Sport and the Olympic Ideal. On that occasion the General Assembly, in response to the appeal of the International Olympic Committee, urged Member States to observe the Olympic Truce from the seventh day before the opening to the seventh day after the closing of the Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway. This year's draft resolution calls upon Member States once again to observe the Truce during the upcoming Winter Games in Nagano, Japan.

The Olympic Truce is rooted in the ancient Greek tradition of *ekecheria*. It expresses mankind's perennial aspiration to peace and the belief that sports bring out the best in human beings, even at the worst of times. In the words of the founder of the modern Games, Baron Pierre de Coubertin:

> "The Olympics conserve the noble and chivalric character that distinguished athletics in the past, so that athletics may continue to educate young people in the admirable way conceived by the Greek masters."

I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to congratulate the political and athletic authorities in Athens on being the host to the Summer Games in the year 2004. Bringing the Olympic torch back to the country where it was first ignited is an important tribute to this noble tradition and the spiritual and cultural values it enshrines.

The United Nations made a solemn pledge in 1993, which it renewed in 1995, to devote time and attention to the Olympic ideal. The noble tradition of the Olympic Truce epitomizes a symbolic link with the most compelling purpose of our Organization: the maintenance of peace and security. But it is only one dimension of a multifaceted relationship. The International Olympic Committee has forged cooperation agreements with many organizations, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations. Let me recall in particular the very strong relationship between the Committee and the United Nations International Drug Control Programme in Vienna, attested to by a cooperation agreement signed last year.

Today, sports have come to play a vital, productive role in enriching the lives of young people by helping them to focus on bettering themselves, engaging in healthy competition and learning to appreciate the social dimension of life. Athletics can also have a critical role in preventing many social ills, foremost among them crime and drug abuse. In recognition of this, the Italian sports authorities have developed over the years a number of programmes to underline how sporting activities can help us to achieve a drug-free society.

In the classical era, the Olympic Games were celebrated every four years for more than a millennium. For generation after generation, the glory of those early games was sung by the great Greek poet Pindar, who, in his First Olympian Ode, wrote:

> "The days that are still to come are the wisest witnesses."

It is my sincere hope that the modern Games may have an equally long and illustrious tradition, so that our children and our children's children into the unforeseeable future may continue to live by the Olympic Ideal.

Ms. Cornette (Guyana): Draft resolution A/52/L.23/Rev.1, of which Guyana is a sponsor, calls for the building of a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic Ideal. At the Olympics, the best of our youths in the field of sports converge in a friendly atmosphere to compete in various events which test their endurance and demonstrate their determination to give of their best for the glory of their countries.

These young athletes from nations large and small help us to reaffirm our belief in the dignity and worth of the human person. They represent resources that could be utilized for the betterment of society. They hold the link to future generations and, with their involvement, future generations may learn to live and work in harmony.

Initiatives taken by the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee to cooperate in order to achieve a common purpose should be beneficial to society as a whole. The Olympic Movement can in fact contribute towards a peaceful and better world by adhering to such principles as the development of mankind and maintaining human dignity. Its work may therefore serve the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

The modern Olympic Movement precedes the United Nations by many decades. Both, however, have achieved significant advances through their histories and both should continue to be dynamic in the future if we are to aim for a better world. Despite interruptions, including the two World Wars, the flames kindled by the sun's rays form a torch for peaceful coexistence.

Through the years, we have witnessed greater numbers of athletes participating, on an equal footing, with others from around the world. Credit for this must be given to the Olympic Charter's anti-discrimination provision, which ensures equal participation by barring discrimination with regard to a country or person on grounds of race, religion, sex or any other reason. We are pleased to see that the International Olympic Committee has been making further contributions of benefit to society by moving beyond a strictly athletic focus to other areas of involvement, working with the United Nations to promote the Olympic Ideal and the observance of the Olympic Truce, as well as participating in humanitarian activities.

Those most in need, our children, are among those who could benefit from such initiatives. Action in this regard by the United Nations Children's Fund in Afghanistan to work with the warring parties to observe a truce during the 1996 Olympics so that children could be vaccinated should be only the beginning of many such initiatives by the United Nations and the Olympic Movement.

The world has changed since the Greeks declared an international truce, or *ekecheria*, so as to allow athletes to travel safely to Olympia to participate in the Olympics. Through international travel, we can circumvent war-torn countries to get to the country hosting the Olympics. While momentary peace allowed athletes to participate in the Olympics in Olympia, it can today be used to benefit society. The 1998 Winter Olympic Games — which will be held in Nagano, Japan, next February — again present us with the opportunity for an Olympic Truce, as called for in the draft resolution. Such a Truce would demonstrate to the world that world peace is within our grasp if we are all prepared to cooperate towards this end. Initial steps such as these could eventually lead to a better, healthier society where all can coexist in harmony. With support from those who have proved to be committed, strong and healthy, we can hope for a better world for future generations.

Mr. Minoves-Triquell (Andorra) (*interpretation from French*): The Olympic Ideal is one of the positive expressions of the competitive instincts which haunt human beings, since the outcome is a "positive sum game". When these instincts are taken to the point of absurdity, which nevertheless has its own logic, a "zero sum game" results, leading to conflicts, the arms race and sometimes war. Such is the history of mankind: the desire to conquer in order to be greater and to have more. Moreover, as we noted during the last world war, war — the ultimate competition — affects both the victor and the vanquished and leaves a trail of death and destruction behind it which is not worthy of the level of civilization which we call our own. The United Nations was therefore established in order to place competition among nations and groups of human beings on the diplomatic stage — competition through words, logic and example.

Pierre de Coubertin had a different idea 50 years earlier in creating the necessary impetus for the Olympic Ideal. This Ideal, whose practical manifestation can be seen today in the Winter and Summer Games which are held every two years in various parts of the world, must be endorsed by the United Nations. That is because, on the one hand, it advances sport as a means of improving physical well-being and self-mastery in activities designed to improve health and physical condition, and, on the other hand, promotes peaceful competition among nations which is settled by the victors and the vanquished on the field of action — competition in which all are winners, since those who are in training for the Games and contribute to them are enriched by their participation.

Anyone who has engaged in sport at any time in life is well aware of the beneficial effects of such activities on the body and the mind. I remember arriving on my bicycle at Olympia in the Peloponnesus several years ago after covering 150 kilometres in a day. It was probably at that moment that, overcome by fatigue and the freshness of the nature which surrounded me, and after pushing my body to its limits, I grasped the meaning of the Olympic Ideal for the individual and how seeking one's physical limits gives human beings a joy and sense of accomplishment and self-control which produces individuals who are better able to navigate through the complexity of existence without resorting, we would hope, to the frustration that leads to violence. Many social problems, as well as the apathy of many young people, could be remedied by practising sports in the spirit of the Olympic Ideal.

It would be Utopian to imagine that two nations in conflict could say to each other: "You know what, Nation X, let us meet at the Olympic Games in Nagano, and the winner between our two ski teams will decide in whose favour our border conflict will be settled". It would also be illogical, since the aim of diplomacy is, if possible, to find a rational and reasonable solution to existing conflicts on the basis of facts and logic. "Winner take all" is the logic of war and it is not acceptable to us. But confrontation through the Olympic Games, in the spirit of competition and fraternity which inspires them, allows an escape valve for nations' aspirations as an extension of the psychological aspirations of the individuals who make them up. When the athletes parade in a stadium, each representing their own country, with equal chances, from nations large and small, we are proud of our own athletes and admire those of other nations. And no lives are lost. On the contrary, even those who do less well emerge better trained from the Games and all nations feel that they are winners.

For all these reasons, the Principality of Andorra associates itself with those countries which, like us, have sponsored the draft resolution on building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic Ideal. My country would like to urge all States to observe the Olympic Truce during the Games of the XXIII Winter Olympiad, to be held in Nagano from 7 to 22 February 1998.

The small countries which are Members of the United Nations have always demonstrated particular sensitivity to the ideals of the Olympic spirit, and in this connection I would like to salute Monaco and His Serene Highness Prince Albert, and also its Ambassador here, for the steadfast support they have given for the presence of the United Nations in the Olympic movement. This is perhaps because small States are obliged by their histories to understand better the "zero sum game" of wars and the "positive sum game" of competition through sport. We are States which win few medals at the Olympic Games, but which participate with determination.

When the flag of the United Nations flies high over the mountains of Japan next February, we will be there.

Ms. Wensley (Australia): Australia is very pleased to support and to sponsor the draft resolution before the Assembly. Quite frankly, it is one which we believe no country could oppose — promoting international understanding through sport and culture; advocating active support for the concept of the Olympic Truce; underscoring the importance of youth; and linking the Olympic Ideal to those of the Charter, which all United Nations Members have pledged to pursue independently and collectively.

The Government of Australia, as proud host to the XXVII Olympiad in the year 2000, has a clear and positive interest in supporting this draft resolution. We are especially proud to have secured the Games that will mark the end of one millennium and the beginning of another. We will be doing our utmost to ensure that the Games represent the values and the ideals not only of Australia — a country which I believe is known for its egalitarianism, for the friendliness of its peoples and for its commitment to a fair go for all — and of the International Olympic Committee, but also of the United Nations.

The last preambular paragraph of the draft resolution refers to the increasing number of joint endeavours of the International Olympic Committee and of the United Nations system, for example in the fields of development, humanitarian assistance, protection of the environment, and health promotion and education. I can assure you that Australia is working energetically to incorporate all of these elements into our planning for the 2000 Games.

With regard to the environment, we are planning to make these Games the greenest Games ever. As Australia's former Ambassador for the environment, I actually had the privilege of presenting what were called our "bid books" to the President of the International Olympic Committee and members of his Committee in Lausanne, and we placed particular emphasis on our plans for the "Green Games". We are implementing the principles of environmental protection and promotion throughout the construction of the facilities, the design of the athletes' village and the entire management of the Games.

Secondly, with respect to health promotion and education, let me make particular mention of just one thing, and that is the Para-Olympics. These will be held in conjunction with the Sydney Olympics and they are going to involve 4000 athletes from 125 countries, competing in 18 sporting events. That, we understand, will be the largest number of Para-Olympic athletes ever to participate in such games. And we want, here too, to set new standards of excellence and of participation in dignity and in safety.

With respect to development, holding the Games in what is obviously a multicultural society located in the Asia-Pacific region will, we believe, give the XXVII Olympics a very distinct development profile. Special efforts are being made to assist developing countries, particularly small States, to facilitate their participation in the Games and in sports training in preparation for the Games. Special efforts are also under way to feature the peoples of Oceania in the opening ceremonies and in the overall celebrations to welcome the world to the region which bears the name Pacific, part of our Olympic and United Nations ideal. Our indigenous people will also have a particular role to play, consistent with the importance that we attach to the promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples.

I have chosen just a few examples to try to bring some practicality to the words that are on the paper of the draft resolution and to underscore the important linkages between the Olympics and the United Nations and the elements that we are seeking to reflect in the Olympic events and celebrations of fairness, tolerance, equity, cooperation and harmony among peoples and with our environment.

It is for all these reasons that Australia supports fully the decision of the International Olympic Committee, as reflected in operative paragraph 5 of the draft resolution, to fly the United Nations flag at all competition sites of the Olympic Games. This sounds a very simple proposition, but quite frankly, at a time when we are all working to reform this Organization, when we want to raise its profile and to persuade the sceptics and the critics of the United Nations of its relevance and its capacity to respond to the needs of all Members, this is especially important.

And again, to go from the rhetoric to the reality, when one thinks about the numbers of people who will see that flag flying, then I think it makes the point. We are estimating that over 10,000 athletes, and approximately 5,000 officials, from some 200 countries will participate in the Games. We are expecting 15,000 media representatives from around the world to come to Sydney, and they will bring the Games to an estimated worldwide audience of more than 3.5 billion people. That is why the flying of the United Nations flag will be so important. It will be a visible daily reminder of the shared ideals of the United Nations and of the International Olympic Committee, something that will reaffirm visibly, simply and directly the importance of the United Nations and the commitment of all participants in the Olympics not just to sport and the ideal of sporting prowess, but to the promotion of international cooperation.

Mr. Pham Quang Vinh (Viet Nam): It is my pleasure to address this plenary meeting on agenda item 24, "Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic Ideal".

I would begin my statement by conveying our appreciation to Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch, President of the International Olympic Committee, for the valuable contribution that he and the Committee have made to the cause of sports and peace. More particularly, His Excellency the Minister of Viet Nam Youth, Mr. Ha Quang Du, Chairman of the Viet Nam Sports Commission and President of the Viet Nam Olympic Committee, has requested my delegation to take this occasion to convey to the President, to the General Assembly and to Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch the compliments and deep appreciation of Viet Nam.

The Olympic Games have long been a significant phenomenon in our society. They promote international understanding, solidarity and friendship among peoples, particularly among the youth of the world, through sport and culture. They also serve the cause of peace and help to promote the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

We take note with great satisfaction of the initiative on the promotion of the ancient Greek tradition of *ekecheria*, or "Olympic Truce". Dedicated to the noble spirit of fraternity and understanding between peoples, this tradition has recently been revived as a serious call for all hostilities to cease during the Olympic Games, thereby mobilizing the people and the youth of the world in the cause of peace. Viet Nam and its Olympic Committee therefore welcome and strongly support the observance of the Olympic Truce during all Olympic Games, particularly during the upcoming Winter Olympic Games, which will be held in Nagano, Japan, in February 1998.

We are encouraged by the fact that this initiative enjoys the broad support of the international community. A clear expression of this support and aspiration is reflected in the large number of sponsors of the draft resolution now before the General Assembly. We take this opportunity to join our voice to the common call on States Members of the United Nations to support and cooperate with the International Olympic Committee in its efforts to promote the Olympic Truce and the contribution of this ideal to the world. On the threshold of the twenty-first century, for the Olympic Games and sports, among others, the ideal of an Olympic Truce will be of great value. We also urge Member States to continue to observe this ideal.

The Government of Viet Nam has always attached great importance to the development of sport and the promotion of peace, solidarity and friendship among the peoples of the world, including the observance of this Ideal in Viet Nam and in regional and international sports competitions. The Vietnamese Government sent a high-ranking representative delegation to attend the seminar on "Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic Ideal". Viet Nam has therefore decided to co-sponsor the draft resolution entitled "Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic Ideal", as contained in document A/52/L.23/Rev.1.

I should like to conclude by confirming our resolve to try our best to successfully implement the Olympic Truce and the Olympic Charter in Viet Nam. We join the sponsors of the draft resolution before us in recommending that the item be included on the agenda of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

I should like to announce that since the introduction of draft resolution A/52/L.23/Rev.1, the following countries have become its co-sponsors: India and Pakistan.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/52/L.23/Rev.1.

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution?

Draft resolution A/52/L.23/Rev.1 was adopted (resolution 52/21).

The Acting President: The General Assembly has concluded the present stage of its consideration of agenda item 24.

Agenda item 40

Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Report of the Secretary-General (A/52/450)

Draft resolution (A/52/L.38)

Amendment (A/52/L.39)

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Denmark to introduce draft resolution A/52/L.38.

Mr. Bøjer (Denmark): As representative of the Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), I have the honour to introduce draft resolution A/52/L.38 on "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe" on behalf of 41 Member States. The following countries have joined the original list of sponsors: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Iceland, Malta, the Republic of Moldova, Monaco, Norway, San Marino, Ukraine, the United States of America and Uzbekistan.

The draft resolution welcomes the fact that cooperation and coordination have further improved in the past year, as well as progress in common work in the field between the United Nations and the OSCE. Since the Budapest Summit in 1994, cooperation and coordination between the two organizations have been continually developed and strengthened in the political and organizational fields. Further strengthening of the relationship between the United Nations and the OSCE has been given high priority by the Danish Chairman-in-Office.

Before turning to the substance of the draft resolution, I should like to associate myself fully with the statement which will be made later this morning by the representative of Luxembourg on behalf of the European Union. I also express my gratitude to the Secretary-General of the OSCE, Mr. Giancarlo Aragona, for being with us in this Hall today.

As the Danish Prime Minister, Mr. Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, underlined in his statement to the General Assembly on 22 September, since the political changes in Europe began at the end of the 1980s, the OSCE has assumed an important role in dealing with crises and potential threats to security in that region. This role is a natural expression of its status as a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter.

The United Nations and the OSCE cooperate closely in a number of areas. By increasingly taking responsibility within its own geographical area, the OSCE not only promotes the objectives of the United Nations in that area, but also contributes to the ability of the United Nations to deal with crises elsewhere.

The close working relationship between the two organizations is seen in joint projects concerning elections, media, humanitarian and refugee law, ombudsman institutions and democratic transition. In the field, the United Nations and the OSCE join forces in such places as Tajikistan, Georgia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and, not least, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Croatia, the OSCE is collaborating with the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES) in preparing the transfer of the civilian tasks of UNTAES to the OSCE.

The most recent and, I would say, the most outstanding example of cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE was the crisis in Albania earlier this year. Faced with a major challenge, the international community acted with resolve. The OSCE, backed by the United Nations, provided the framework for an international presence.

Based on a recommendation from the OSCE, the Security Council endorsed the mandate of the multinational protection force that provided the security necessary for international assistance. Our efforts were successful. New elections have been held and the situation has improved considerably.

It has been proved to us that immediate action is of the essence and that a strong regional organization facilitates the necessary decisions by the Security Council. Close cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations can be an important tool in conflict management and resolution. Regional organizations must assist the United Nations but should not seek to replace it. Their involvement in conflict management must be based on a mandate given by the United Nations and on the obligation to report regularly to the United Nations.

We still have important tasks in front of us. But I feel confident that the good cooperation and coordination between the United Nations and the OSCE will continue, and that the two organizations will still be able to cope with the challenges they are faced with.

On behalf of the sponsors of draft resolution A/52/L.38, let me express my sincere hope that the draft resolution will be adopted by consensus. We have, in fact, done our very best to make such an adoption possible, in that we have used wording expressing common denominators, insofar as this was at all possible without depriving the text of any substantive message.

Our aim is a debate in this Assembly and a resolution adopted which may promote, and not complicate, the efforts of the OSCE to solve its important task — efforts which, as far as the Danish Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE is concerned, should reach their culmination with the OSCE Ministerial Meeting in Copenhagen on 18 and 19 December 1997.

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of Azerbaijan to introduce the amendment to draft resolution A/52/L.38 contained in document A/52/L.39.

Mr. Kouliev (Azerbaijan)(*interpretation from Russian*): I should like to introduce Azerbaijan's amendment contained in document A/52/L.39. This is an amendment to the draft resolution on cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

I believe that the grounds for our proposal are well known to all of you. Paragraph 16 of draft resolution A/52/L.38 does not deal with the real essence of the problem and departs from language adopted earlier by the General Assembly. This matter involves the highest interests of Azerbaijan, its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The territorial integrity of Azerbaijan has frequently been upheld by the world community, *inter alia* by the United Nations Security Council in its resolutions on the

Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict: 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993). At the 1996 Lisbon Summit of the OSCE, all European States, with the exception of Armenia, once again reconfirmed this principle. The Secretary-General, in paragraph 7 of his report on cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE in document A/52/450, also takes a very clear stand on this question, noting that Nagorny-Karabakh is territorially part of Azerbaijan.

The text of the Azerbaijan amendment is not new. Twice before, at its forty-ninth and fifty-first sessions, the General Assembly adopted this text. Essentially, it relies fully on the relevant provisions of resolution 49/13, which was adopted without a vote by consensus, including Armenia, and repeats the relevant paragraph of last year's resolution 51/57.

The amendment we are proposing also reflects one of the basic principles of a settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, confirmed by the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE at the Lisbon Summit and adopted as an annex to the Lisbon Summit Declaration [A/51/716, appendix I]. The delegation of Azerbaijan calls on the General Assembly to do as it did last year — to respect this principle and to support our amendment in document A/52/L.39.

Mr. Wolzfeld (Luxembourg)*(interpretation from French)*: I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia — and the associated country Cyprus align themselves with this statement.

First of all, I should like to take this opportunity to welcome Mr. Giancarlo Aragona, Secretary-General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). His presence here today testifies to the importance of the ever- closer cooperation that has grown between the United Nations and the OSCE.

The European Union welcomes the fact that during the past year the United Nations and the OSCE have intensified their cooperation and the coordination of their activities, as shown by regular meetings between the United Nations Secretary-General and the Chairman-in-Office and the Secretary-General of the OSCE.

As a driving force behind the integration, stability and prosperity of Europe, the European Union has played a leading role in the development of the OSCE. The OSCE, which is concerned with transatlantic and pan-European security, has become a key forum for management of the changes that have occurred in Europe in recent years. The European Union will continue to play an important role in supporting stability and security in Europe, while it enlarges in the coming years. We remain committed to strengthening in parallel the enhanced political effectiveness and operational capacities of the OSCE. We support the enhancement of the role of the OSCE as a primary instrument of preventive diplomacy, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation in the OSCE region.

The European Union also wishes to reaffirm its support for the activities of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities.

Strengthening the role of the OSCE will enable it better to assume its responsibilities as a regional organization within the meaning of Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter. Consequently, the OSCE is examining in detail the means of putting into operation the "OSCE first" principle, including the possibility for OSCE States jointly to decide to refer a dispute to the Security Council, notwithstanding the position of the States parties to the dispute. Of particular importance in the relationship between the United Nations and the OSCE is the high level of mutual support which each organization provides for the other.

In recent years the two organizations have cooperated closely or have embarked on joint operations in a number of peacekeeping and international security missions.

As regards the former Yugoslavia, the OSCE was given, at the Peace Implementation Conference held in London on 4 and 5 December 1996, the mission of supervising the municipal elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina which took place on 13 and 14 September 1997. The European Union welcomes the close cooperation between the OSCE and the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH), which helped it to organize polling in accordance with cooperation arrangements made for the September 1996 elections, when the observers of the United Nations International Police Task Force (IPTF) assisted the OSCE and were deployed throughout the country on election day to monitor and advise local police.

On 14 February 1997 the Arbitral Tribunal decided that the Brcko area would be placed under temporary international supervision. The OSCE opened a centre in Brcko in order to define common objectives for the implementation of the decision and to strengthen its presence in the area. The OSCE is cooperating actively with the Offices of the High Representative and of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in order to ensure respect for human rights in the region.

In Georgia the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is cooperating with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and with the OSCE Mission on preparations for the return of the Ossetians to their homes in Georgia. The Secretary-General's Special Representative is in frequent contact with the OSCE Head of Mission at Tbilisi. On 10 December 1996 the United Nations opened an office in Sukhumi for the protection and promotion of human rights in Abkhazia. On 25 April this year the Officer-in-Charge of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Secretary-General of the OSCE signed a memorandum of understanding under which the OSCE agreed to second to the Office a member of its mission in Georgia with experience in human rights activities.

The inter-Tajik talks, which OSCE representatives attended as observers, resulted in the signing, on 27 June 1997, of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan. The United Nations and the OSCE are continuing their efforts to help the implementation of the General Agreement. The OSCE representatives signed the Protocol on Guarantees and take part in the work of the Contact Group set up in Dushanbe under the Protocol. The United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) is continuing to act in close cooperation with the OSCE mission in the country, and the United Nations and the OSCE are closely coordinating their efforts to facilitate the implementation of the General Agreement.

The conflict in Nagorny Karabakh, where the United Nations has been providing technical and political support to the OSCE Minsk process, is an example of practical cooperation. The European Union appeals to the parties to intensify their efforts to achieve a negotiated solution. The principles that ought to lead to a settlement respecting the dignity and the interests of the parties are well known, and have been clearly defined within the framework of the OSCE. The European Union welcomes the joint declaration by the Azerbaijani and Armenian Presidents to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 10 October 1997. It appeals to the parties to continue the negotiations within the OSCE Minsk process.

As a result of the political crisis that shook Albania at the beginning of 1997, cooperation between the OSCE and various United Nations bodies has become imperative. From the beginning of the crisis the OSCE took the lead at the political level, and the Security Council, through its resolutions 1101 (1997) of 28 March 1997 and 1114 (1997) of 19 June 1997, approved the mandate of the multinational protection force deployed from March to August 1997. Thanks to the cooperation between the OSCE, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund, humanitarian aid quickly reached Albanians in need. In this context, the European Union wishes to express very warm thanks to Mr. Vranitzky, the personal representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, for his remarkable efforts in the field and within international organizations to enable parliamentary elections to be held in acceptable conditions on 29 June 1997. The European Union welcomes the fact that the OSCE will continue to support economic and political reconstruction efforts in Albania.

We also welcome the conclusions of the OSCE summit meeting in Lisbon on 2 and 3 December 1996, which took place at an important time in the development of the European security architecture. The Lisbon Declaration on a Common and Comprehensive Security Model for Europe for the Twenty-first Century will strengthen security and stability in the OSCE region and contribute to providing a framework within which all States, security organizations and regional and subregional arrangements can work together in a constructive and mutually reinforcing way. The ministerial meeting to be held in Copenhagen on 18 and 19 December will continue to work towards that end, in particular by drawing up a European security charter.

The human dimension remains a priority for the OSCE, as it has been since the beginning of the Helsinki process. Respect for and the promotion of human rights, the elimination of all forms of discrimination and free and independent media are basic requirements for a viable democracy, the consolidation of democratic institutions and the establishment of confidence between government and people. The implementation meeting on human dimension issues held in Warsaw this month provided ample evidence of that.

In conclusion, the European Union expresses its appreciation to the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, the Permanent Representative of Denmark, and his delegation for their excellent work; we look forward to working closely with the incoming Chairman-in-Office, the Permanent Representative of Poland.

The European Union supported draft resolution A/52/L.38, which was sponsored by all the members of the European Union.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): The substantial progress made in strengthening and enhancing practical cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) over the past year proves conclusively that cooperation between these two leading international Organizations, in accordance with Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter, is becoming a major factor in strengthening global and regional stability in a multipolar world. Such cooperation should continue to focus on issues of key interest to the international community, primarily those of promoting the settlement of conflicts, peacekeeping, and providing for humanitarian aspects of security and development, including observance of human rights and the rights of ethnic minorities, refugees and displaced persons.

Russia has consistently supported the institutional strengthening of the OSCE and its transformation into a fully fledged regional organization in the sense of Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter. The OSCE's universal nature provides a basis for the consolidation of its coordinating and system-building role with regard to other European and Euro-Atlantic organizations dealing with security matters.

The President took the Chair.

The implementation of the fundamental decisions of the OSCE Summit meeting held in Lisbon, regarding in particular the elaboration of a common and comprehensive security model for Europe in the twenty-first century, will be a notable landmark on the road towards this goal. We attach special significance to the work on a charter on European security within the OSCE framework, which is to form the basis for regional security arrangements as envisaged by the United Nations Charter. This document, in terms of its significance, should be commensurate with the Helsinki Final Act and, in fact, further move the member States of the OSCE towards the establishment of a common area of equal security with no dividing lines. In our view, special attention should be paid in the charter to the security interests of States that have not joined military and political alliances and have not expressed the desire to join such alliances in the foreseeable future. During the forthcoming regular meeting of the OSCE Council of Foreign Ministers, to be held in Copenhagen on 17 and 18 December 1997, a detailed decision needs to be reached on the scope and parameters of the future charter.

An important contribution to constructing the new European architecture for security and cooperation must be made by the United Nations, whose political and expert support is extremely useful in realizing the common European idea. One of the priority areas for interaction between the United Nations and the OSCE should be the enhancement of the common European potential for peacekeeping, including the strengthening of its normative basis, while recognizing the irrevocability of the United Nations Security Council's functions and prerogatives under the Charter in this domain. Practically speaking, it will not be long before the question of the OSCE's own peacekeeping arises, and this too will need to be addressed from the very outset on the basis of close cooperation with the United Nations, with the support of the Charter and the diverse peacekeeping experience of the United Nations.

Russia welcomes and supports the further strengthening of cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE in the settlement of conflicts in the territory of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), particularly in Georgia, Tajikistan, and Nagorny Karabakh. The more effective involvement of the OSCE in the settlement of a number of conflicts on CIS territory will bolster the established and proven negotiating formats. The OSCE should not seek to replace the United Nations where the United Nations, because of its universality, is providing effective coordination of the efforts of the various organizations. On the other hand, it would be expedient for the OSCE to intensify its work along the lines of its specialization, such as, for example, human rights monitoring, support for the formation of democratic institutions, and the supervision of elections.

The United Nations and the OSCE are cooperating successfully in the implementation of the Bosnian Peace Agreement. The holding of municipal elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina in September, under OSCE supervision, was an important stage of the process. We hope that the OSCE mission in Bosnia will continue to work in close contact with relevant United Nations structures and specialized agencies in resolving such vital matters as protection of the rights of ethnic minorities, the problems of refugees, and the normal functioning of municipal authorities. Ensuring the rights of refugees, including their property rights and personal safety, as well as monitoring observance of the rights of ethnic minorities, should also be given priority attention within the framework of the newly established OSCE long-term mission in Croatia, whose mandate will encompass the entire territory of that country.

Further evidence of the deepening partnership between the two organizations came during the planning and execution of the multinational protection force operation in Albania under mandate from the United Nations Security Council. The success of this operation is a good example of the need for overall supervision of regional peacekeeping operations by the Security Council.

Of great importance also is United Nations-OSCE collaboration in the humanitarian dimension, *inter alia*, through the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the United Nations human rights structures. A promising new direction for cooperation between the two organizations is tackling the problems of forced migrants in CIS territory with the participation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration.

Russia supports OSCE activities on the "Situation of human rights in Estonia and Lativia", which was the subject of a decision adopted by consensus at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly. We proceed from the assumption that the recommendations of OSCE bodies, especially those of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, will continue to receive active attention.

The establishment in the OSCE secretariat of the post of coordinator of economic and environmental affairs enhances that area of the organization's activities without duplicating the functions of other international agencies in the area. We note with satisfaction the effective assistance to OSCE's work in the economic sphere provided by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). We are counting on the OSCE coordinator's close collaboration with ECE.

There are also instances of fruitful cooperation between the two organizations in the field. The OSCE, especially with regard to its missions, is collaborating closely with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the implementation of a number of projects in Central Asia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Estonia and Latvia.

Russia intends to continue to work actively to increase the practical results generated by cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE. We hope that the draft resolution on this subject, of which Russia is a sponsor, will give significant additional momentum to work now under way in this direction.

Mr. Yel'chenko (Ukraine): The delegation of Ukraine fully associates itself with the statement just made by the representative of Luxembourg on behalf of the European Union on this agenda item. At the same time, I would like to take this opportunity to outline in more detail the main aspects of Ukraine's position on this important issue.

First, we would like to note with satisfaction that in the past few years, cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has been activated at both the political and organizational levels. Of special importance is the development of cooperation between the two organizations in the field of early warning, conflict prevention and crisis management. In this respect, the recent Albanian experience is a good example. This example can be considered as representing a new trend in relations between the United Nations and the OSCE, when the OSCE was the first to display initiative and action.

Ukraine highly appreciates the consistent peacemaking efforts of the United Nations and the OSCE in the former Yugoslavia. The implementation of the Dayton Accords has become a serious challenge for these organizations. We also hope that the high level of cooperation reached between the United Nations and the OSCE in this process will be maintained during the period of post-conflict peace-building aimed at creating a genuine civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We also favour the strengthening of the United Nations and the OSCE's peacekeeping role in the settlement of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. The Security Council should continue its political support of the OSCE's efforts and should help the OSCE to benefit from the United Nations peacekeeping experience. To this end, it is expedient to increase regular invitations to representatives of the United Nations Secretariat to meetings of the OSCE Minsk Group, and to inform the Security Council regularly of progress in the negotiations.

As an observer, the OSCE participates in the political negotiations organized by the United Nations with regard to the peace process in Georgia, including those undertaken through the Human Rights Office in Sukhumi, as well as those in Tajikistan carried out under United Nations auspices. In this context, in our view, it is important to establish a better exchange of information between the relevant OSCE missions and the United Nations offices in those regions.

Ukraine supports enhancement of the OSCE role in the settlement of the Transdniester conflict, as well as for wider involvement of United Nations experts in this process. Ukraine, together with the OSCE and the Russian Federation, is playing the role of mediator and guarantor of observance of the arrangements achieved by the parties, and is doing its best to promote stabilization in this region. It has repeatedly stated its readiness to send its peacekeeping contingent to the region if mandated by the United Nations or the OSCE.

Ukraine supports the development of the United Nations and the OSCE's peacekeeping potential. In so doing, we consider that peacekeeping operations in the OSCE area should be carried out only in accordance with the appropriate United Nations or OSCE mandates, with obligatory fulfilment of the requirements for peacekeeping operations contained in the relevant United Nations and OSCE documents.

We believe that cooperation between the United Nations and OSCE in the sphere of the human dimension should be a priority for these two Organizations. This has been proved more than ever by forced migration, refugees and displaced persons, which pose a real challenge to security and stability in Europe. These problems cannot be solved by an individual country on its own. Proceeding from the foregoing, it is necessary to develop proper interaction between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Warsaw OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities.

Ecological and economic dimensions are no less important fields of cooperation between the United Nations and OSCE. In particular, we stand for intensification of cooperation between OSCE and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, which should be more oriented towards assisting economies in transition.

In conclusion, I would like to note that life itself proves the necessity to maintain regular contact and cooperation between the United Nations and OSCE in different dimensions of security. It is necessary to further explore possible forms and methods of interaction, while taking into account the possibilities and advantages of each organization in order to divide their functions on the basis of the principle of mutual support.

Mr. Jusys (Lithuania): We associated ourselves with what the Permanent Representative of Luxembourg said on behalf of the European Union. That statement reflected precisely how we see the matter. I would like only to complement the view of the European Union with our national perspective, as this agenda item encompasses both the general issue of model cooperation between the United Nations and a regional arrangement, and the particular issue for us as a European State.

We are pleased that this item has become a regular one on our agenda. Two months ago the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, Mr. Saudargas, said from this rostrum,

> "We believe in a regional approach to regional issues. We praise the United Nations reliance on regional organizations. The Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe is a good example of what a regional institution with a limited budget can do rather than placing the burden on the United Nations." [*Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Plenary Meetings*, 10th meeting, p. 10]

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has a bright future as a full-fledged regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter. The report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations [A/51/489] demonstrates that the spirit of Chapter VIII is being understood and utilized in a wise and efficient manner.

We commend the contribution of Denmark, as the Chairman-in-Office of OSCE this year, and we are confident that the incoming chairmanship of Poland will ensure that OSCE continues to play a result-oriented role in Europe.

We also welcome the presence today of the Secretary-General of OSCE, Mr. Giancarlo Aragona, whom we thank for the efficient management of the functioning of the Secretariat of his Organization. His staff may be small in numbers, but its contribution is very considerable.

Last year we encouraged working-level contacts between the competent institutions of the United Nations and OSCE in appropriate areas. Today we welcome the increased contacts between the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Chairman-in-Office and Secretary-General of OSCE that took place and proved to be useful. They are all in line with paragraph 116 of the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on United Nations reform [A/51/950], which reads as follows:

> "Cooperation with regional organizations will be intensified and regional organizations will increasingly become partners of the United Nations in all activities related to the maintenance of international peace and security, including conflict-prevention."

Parallel to the secretarial contacts on the part of the United Nations, there could perhaps be more dialogue on the political level between, for instance, the President of the United Nations General Assembly and the OSCE Chairman-in-Office.

The OSCE is a unique institution due to its pan-European and transatlantic membership. It enhances the ability of all participating States, large and small, to control their security by drawing on the broad range of tools available to them within and outside OSCE. It has sufficient capabilities of preventive diplomacy, assuming a greater role in the preservation of stability in Europe and reacting to suddenly emerging situations of tension or crisis both swiftly and flexibly.

Lithuania supports the strengthening of the activities of OSCE as a primary instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. Like the United Nations, OSCE, with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe within the framework of OSCE, plays a key role in enhancing stability, transparency and predictability, which are indispensable elements of any security architecture, and more specifically, in the development of a broad framework within which European cooperative security can be strengthened. Forms of current and potential cooperation between the United Nations and OSCE include consultations, diplomatic support, operational support, co-deployment and, whenever appropriate, joint action.

The complex nature of recent initiatives aimed at restoring peace in areas of conflict has shown the need for comprehensive conflict management and resolution, which require close cooperation between States and a variety of institutions. Comprehensive dialogue between the two Organizations can produce tangible results, or at least good prospects. The joint action of the United Nations Mission of Observers and the OSCE mission in Tajikistan, for instance, opened up chances to reunify the Tajik nation on the basis of the General Agreement. Cooperation helped to contain the crisis in Albania and avert graver consequences. The United Nations and OSCE have facilitated dialogue and offered opportunities to conflicting parties in various areas of the Caucasus to work towards ending disagreements.

Most notably, if the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina are to thank someone for a second and third chance for peace, it is the United Nations, OSCE and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. We have always believed that the record of the two Organizations in the former Yugoslavia is much better than it would have been if the United Nations were left alone to deal with the challenges.

Although primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security lies with the United Nations Security Council, even the United Nations, with its vast experience and unmatched global network, cannot take on all the world's problems by itself. OSCE should relieve the United Nations of some of its regional burdens. This could include the possibility of referring a conflict to the Security Council with a recommendation, if necessary without the support of the party or parties concerned.

In cases where the United Nations and OSCE are active in the same country and cooperation has to be very concrete, the primary responsibility should lie with OSCE. A good example of words being transformed into concrete deeds is the expanding OSCE mission in Croatia, which will take over the tasks of the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium.

There are many ways organizations can fully realize their potential. The United Nations and OSCE, whose security dimension is based on confidence-building measures, such as conventional arms control, transparency in armaments and information-sharing, can complement one another by acting together in response to security challenges. For example, we laud the exchange of information which takes place within OSCE, including the data submitted to the United Nations Register of

Conventional Arms. That, in our view, enhances the efficiency of this United Nations mechanism. This procedure was also found effective when applied to the Chemical Weapons Convention. The global exchange of military information adopted by OSCE in 1994 may serve as an example to other regions. The OSCE code of conduct for the democratic control of military forces appears to have universal applicability too.

Humanitarian affairs is another principal area of cooperation between two or even more institutions. It is commendable that information is regularly exchanged in tripartite meetings between the United Nations, OSCE and the Council of Europe. These contacts have grown from sharing factual information on the human rights situation in the OSCE area to discussing actions in more fundamental dimensions, such as democracy-building, the rule of law, constitutional matters and minority rights. We endorse and strongly encourage this development.

We welcome the cooperation of the United Nations — in particular, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration — with the OSCE in assisting the management of increasing migration problems in the OSCE area and beyond. The involvement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in the return and reintegration of deported people is a good new step in tackling one of the outstanding social issues in the OSCE region.

In the quest for the best European security formula, Lithuania is from time to time offered various prescriptions, such as unilateral security guarantees for the Baltic States. We believe that neither unilateral security guaranties legitimized by international agreement nor regional security pacts can ensure European security. There can be no regionalized or unilateralized security in Europe. All the continent's nations are not only bound to be together, but are meant eventually to become partners with one aim and one fate.

We, rather, see European security as an indivisible asset, and cooperation as a common responsibility of all OSCE members. The Joint Communique of the Presidents of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania issued on 10 November 1997 reiterated

> "the shared position that unilateral security guarantees do not correspond to the spirit of the new Europe and that they, as well as regional security pacts, have never been on the agenda of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania".

Our two main pillars in building our international future are good-neighbourly relations and integration into European and trans-Atlantic institutions. The signing of the border treaty between Lithuania and Russia on 24 October this year was a major contribution to the former pillar. Respect for, and the free and effective exercise of, a State's right to accede to treaties of alliances — a fundamental OSCE principle — is an essential part of the latter pillar. Lithuania seeks a place in those institutions which contribute to the goals of the OSCE and complement those of the United Nations.

There will be only one United Nations and one Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Each is unique in its own way and each is useful, if not indispensable, in addressing international issues. Together they form a mutually complementary part of multilateral tools for contacts between the peoples of Europe and peoples all over the world. We ought to make the best use of these powerful tools.

Draft resolution A/52/L.38, introduced by Denmark, invites us to do exactly that and deserves consensus approval. We appeal to all Member States to look beyond their national interests, however legitimate, take a broader approach and adopt the draft resolution without a vote.

Mrs. Fritsche (Liechtenstein): It has been said many times that the end of the cold war has brought about major changes for the United Nations. To an even greater extent, this also applies to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which has reshaped and even reinvented itself over the past few years.

The General Assembly decided four years ago to invite the OSCE to participate in the sessions and work of the Assembly as an observer. Over this period, cooperation between the two Organizations has been steadily enhanced, deepened and further developed. The increasing necessity and demand for activities in the field of peacekeeping and related areas, and the simultaneous political and financial problems connected with these United Nations activities, have made it clear at an early stage that the involvement of regional organizations in this area has to be enhanced, for their mutual benefit. We are gratified to note that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe itself has made a very substantive contribution to this end over the past few years.

The cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE, based on the principles of mutual benefit and complementarity, today covers a wide range of issues, among which country-specific activities are perhaps the most prominent. The OSCE has thus continued to play a very important role in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially by supervising the municipal elections, on which occasion the assistance of the United Nations International Police Task Force was of vital importance for carrying out this task smoothly.

An even more illustrative example of the more action-oriented work of the OSCE is that of its activities in Albania, where it responded quickly to a situation of crisis while receiving the necessary support from a multinational protection force mandated by the Security Council. This type of targeted mission, entrusted with a clear mandate and time-frame, is of exemplary value for future situations of a similar nature. While such missions are of considerable importance for creating the necessary political momentum for the overall activities of the OSCE, much of its work may be less visible, but it is of equal value for achieving medium-term and long-term results. An excellent example is the activities aimed at confidence-building and reconciliation in different parts of the former Yugoslavia, particularly those undertaken in cooperation with the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium.

The report contained in document A/52/450 testifies to the increased cooperation between the two Organizations in specific thematic areas. We have taken note with particular interest of the activities relative to the follow-up of the regional conference on refugee questions in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the close cooperation between the OSCE and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

While we welcome the increased cooperation reflected in the report, it appears to us that there is potential for further deepening the interaction between the two Organizations. The more action-oriented work of the OSCE is a development which is beneficial to the Organization itself and to the United Nations, but at the same time the OSCE should continue to rely on the standards of achievement and the areas of work which have constituted its primary strengths in the past. These activities — in the field of the human dimension, for example — can also be of considerable value for the United Nations, and there could be an increased exchange of information and expertise on them. In this context, we note with gratitude the enhanced importance of the work of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. It should also be kept in mind that the institutional basis of the OSCE in certain areas has taken on forms and dimensions that provide a deep understanding and vast experience. This can be beneficial to the work of the United Nations. The protection of minorities and the excellent work of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities naturally come to mind in this context.

In summary, we would like to express our satisfaction at the level and especially the quality of cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE, while looking forward to its further deepening and development. It is of crucial importance that the cooperation of international organizations, especially with regard to emergency situations and field operations, be based on a clear understanding, which sets out a framework for cooperation and allows for the maximum possible coordination of activities. The experience gained from the major field operations in which the OSCE has been involved over the past several years has shown that there is room for further improvement. We have taken note with great interest of the initiative to create a "platform for cooperative security" to serve as a model for cooperation in the area of peace and security in the twenty-first century, based on the principle of the equality of all partners.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Mr. Giancarlo Aragona, Secretary-General of the OSCE, for his presence during this debate, and to express, on behalf of my Government, our thanks to the Government of Denmark for the remarkable and efficient manner in which it has carried out its responsibilities as Chairman-in-Office for the year 1997.

Mr. Biørn Lian (Norway): Since its summit meeting in Paris in 1990, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has demonstrated increased capacity to cooperate and coordinate with the United Nations and other security-related organizations in handling regional crises. The OSCE has developed adequate political tools and has continuously enhanced its abilities with respect to early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation and has thus been significant in maintaining peace and security in its region. The OSCE has universal membership in the region and a strong set of common commitments in terms of the human dimension or human rights, economic cooperation and security issues, and it is active in arms control and disarmament. The shared commitments of the member States of the OSCE and the consensus principle of the organization are cornerstones on which the OSCE works. Key assets of the OSCE are its adaptability and creativity when dealing with early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. For our part, we want to see the operative capacity of the OSCE further developed, including improved financing of its operations, but without creating new or complicated structures and without tampering with the flexibility of the organization.

As a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter, with observer status since 1993, the OSCE has been able to relieve the United Nations of some of its workload. This role should be strengthened and further developed. We note with satisfaction the conclusion of the Secretary General in his report [A/52/450] that the cooperation and coordination have improved over the past year. We believe they can be further improved. In our view, the interchange between the organizations and the OSCE's position as a regional arrangement should be further refined and actively applied. The active and positive cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE in the field deserves to be particularly underlined in this connection. In countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia and Tajikistan, to mention a few, the United Nations and the OSCE work for the same cause but perform different tasks, each organization drawing on its comparative advantages.

The OSCE, however, is not a small-scale blueprint of the United Nations. The OSCE does not have a universal character and works mainly with diplomatic instruments. Its missions take the form of highly advanced diplomatic undertakings, facilitating democracy, human rights and, thus, stability. The OSCE is cost-effective, and it achieves concrete results with a lean organization and a relatively modest financing. The OSCE is determined to develop further and to improve its competence in its various fields of activity, and it therefore deserves our support in doing so.

We regret that it does not seem possible to adopt the present draft resolution without a vote. We strongly encourage all delegations to support the draft resolution introduced by Denmark earlier today and sponsored by Norway and many other CSCE member countries.

Mr. Saliba (Malta): Cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations has assumed increasing importance following the demise of the cold war. The regional conflicts characteristic of our time have led the international community to examine this question in greater depth in attempting to address the root causes of conflict and tension.

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was born out of the tensions of a cold war which divided Europe. Notwithstanding such division, the then-CSCE addressed questions that were related not only to the prevailing security situations but also to the more fundamental aspects of the economic and human dimensions. Poised as it was at the height of cold-war logic, the CSCE survived and developed. Its transformation into the organization it is today is indicative of the increased cooperation within the region following the demise of the cold war.

Notwithstanding, conflict erupted, bringing to the fore the dangers posed by ethnic strife. The horrors witnessed during the war in the former Yugoslavia shook the core of Europe and brought a sense of urgency regarding the need for more effective preventive efforts in dealing with such situations. The United Nations too was faced with a number of regional conflicts and grappled with ways and means to manage and address them.

It was in this context that Malta proposed that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) declare itself a regional organization in the terms of Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter. As my Prime Minister stated last year at the Lisbon summit meeting:

> "In Helsinki, we declared our understanding that the OSCE is a regional arrangement in terms of Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter. It is Malta's view that the time has come to find a lasting and practical formula for cooperation between the OSCE as a regional arrangement and the Security Council of the United Nations, a formula that gives due consideration to the separate and distinct tasks of these two institutions. There already exists the need for a more structured and rational division of competencies between the OSCE and the Security Council."

Efforts must be redoubled to reach a consensus on the possibility of using OSCE mechanisms as the instrument of first resort in our common efforts at preventive diplomacy within the OSCE, without in any way prejudicing the provisions of Article 35 of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Lisbon Declaration recognized this fact by stating that:

> "In exceptional circumstances the participating States many jointly decide to refer a matter to the United Nations Security Council on behalf of OSCE whenever, in their judgement, action by the Security Council may be required under the relevant provisions of Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations". [A/51/716, annex II, para. 10]

While any member of the United Nations may bring any dispute to the attention of the Security Council or the General Assembly, a joint reference of disputes to the Security Council will give OSCE's decision additional momentum. This commitment therefore constitutes an important element of conflict prevention.

In assessing the cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE, an analysis of the involvement of each, singly or in concert, in different areas is required. The OSCE's involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains its biggest challenge and achievement so far. The Lisbon Summit Declaration [A/51/716, annex I] confirmed that the OSCE will continue to play an important role in the promotion and consolidation of peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly in the supervision and conduct of the municipal elections, as well as in providing assistance in the implementation of the other tasks mandated to it under the Dayton Accord. The OSCE's roles in Tajikistan, in Georgia and most recently in Albania have also demonstrated the organization's contribution to regional and international peace and security and enhanced cooperation with the United Nations.

Activities undertaken by OSCE with regard to the human dimension through its Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) remain vital if we are to ensure democratic governance and respect for human rights. It is perhaps those aspects which serve as a tool of preventive diplomacy itself as they seek to build the concepts of social justice and the rule of law which could ultimately consolidate peace both within and among States. We note with satisfaction the close contacts between the United Nations Centre for Human Rights in Geneva and ODIHR, as well as the support given by the Economic Commission for Europe to the OSCE economic dimension.

Malta welcomes the tripartite consultations among the United Nations, the OSCE and the Council of Europe. These consultations will aim at furthering the principle of a pragmatic rationalization of activities in the field and as a result will lead to an enhancement and strengthening of such consultations.

Equally important is the work undertaken by the High Commissioner on National Minorities in seeking to promote tolerance and mutual respect within and among communities. Such activities remain a cornerstone in the building of respect for human rights and rule of law in the OSCE space.

Since the early origins of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in Helsinki, Malta has assiduously promoted the concept that security and stability in the Mediterranean are closely linked to European and, consequently, to international peace and security. Ever since, Malta has promoted the Mediterranean dimension of the OSCE and focused its efforts on initiatives meant to enhance the access of the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation to all activities of the OSCE, particularly to the Permanent Council and the Forum for Security Cooperation.

Malta has, on several occasions, raised awareness regarding the important Mediterranean chapter of the Helsinki Final Act. The possible means of achieving this were presented by Malta in its comprehensive response to the General Assembly resolution 51/50, entitled "Strengthening of security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region", as contained in the document.

In view of the report of the Secretary-General presented on this item, Malta is of the view that the continuation of the informal understanding that there should be a division of labour between the OSCE and the United Nations is indicative of the fact that a re-examination of such an understanding is required with a view to establishing a proper and appropriate division of labour between the United Nations and the OSCE. This would invariably charge the OSCE with responsibilities worthy of its status as a regional arrangement in accordance with Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter and effectively enhance the existing framework of cooperation between the two Organizations.

Mr. Kondi (Albania): The Albanian delegation is very pleased at the presence today of Mr. Giancarlo

Aragona, Secretary-General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Albania values highly the importance of the cooperation between the United Nations and the regional organizations and arrangements, being convinced of the positive impact of such cooperation for the benefit of international peace and security. Regional organizations are useful instruments for the promotion of peace, security and cooperation within regions, on the basis of the concept of individual security.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has proved to be an effective Organization through its activities in different parts of the old continent. We appreciate, in particular, the role of the OSCE in conflict prevention and crisis management. The Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities has turned out to be a valuable institution for the promotion of respect for the rights of persons belonging to national minorities in the OSCE area, as well as for overcoming problems and difficult situations concerning national minorities in a number of countries. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has been one of the main pillars of that Organization in its efforts to enhance democracy and support democratic processes in many parts of the OSCE area.

We believe that the cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE can be very useful in fields such as conflict prevention and crisis management, through the deployment of joint missions, sharing information and joint-assessment missions, as well as in post-conflict regions, through coordinated programmes covering areas such as demilitarization, the establishment of democratic institutions and the organizing and monitoring of elections.

The Albanian Government highly appreciates the role and contribution of OSCE in overcoming the crisis which broke out in Albania during the first half of the current year. The contributions of OSCE, its Chairman-in-Office and his personal representative have been instrumental in reaching a political solution to the crisis. The electoral assistance and monitoring of the 29 June elections of this year were crucial in ensuring the success of those elections, thus opening the way for the efforts aimed at the rehabilitation of the country. We have all witnessed the strong political support OSCE gave to our request for an international humanitarian and stabilizing presence to be sent to Albania. The Security Council — on the basis of the decisions of OSCE and bearing in mind the readiness of that Organization to further help in the efforts to overcome the crisis — authorized the multinational protection force and its prompt deployment. The expeditious authorization of the force and its rapid deployment contributed fundamentally in the prevention of the escalation of the situation into a full-scale conflict. We applaud the cooperation between the United Nations and OSCE in the case of the Albanian crisis and consider it an example of coordinated international action undertaken at the right time and in a proper manner.

At present, after the parliamentary elections, Albania is trying to build democratic institutions and establish the rule of law, and to this end we need support. In the country, OSCE has deployed a mission to help the democratization efforts. The Albanian Government is closely cooperating with that mission.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has a rich record of involvement in dealing with the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Its role in assisting Bosnia and Herzegovina to establish democratic institutions and implement the Peace Agreement is great.

However, we note with regret that, despite the continued calls from the OSCE, the General Assembly and the Security Council, the long-term mission of OSCE has not yet been able to return to Kosovo because of the lack of cooperation on the part of the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). We would like to mention the repeated calls the General Assembly has addressed to those authorities, most recently through resolution 51/111, urging them to allow the immediate and unconditional return of the OSCE mission to Kosovo. Referring to the same resolution, we have hopes for the efforts of the Secretary-General to establish an adequate international monitoring presence in Kosovo. Albania's call for increased international efforts for the peaceful solution of the Kosovo problem stems from its wish and desire to contribute positively to the solution of the remaining problems of peace in the region, to develop good-neighbourly relations and to enhance and strengthen peace and stability in the still troubled Balkans.

Albania strongly supports draft resolution A/52/L.38 and joins the list of its sponsors.

Mr. Žbogar (Slovenia): Slovenia associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Luxembourg on behalf of European Union (EU) and would like to add a few points.

My delegation would like to thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan for preparing the report on cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The report confirms our belief that there is a wide range of activities in which the two Organizations can develop and are already developing useful cooperation and coordination to the benefit of international peace and security, democratization and respect for human and minority rights.

I should also like to take the opportunity to welcome the OSCE Secretary-General, Giancarlo Aragona. His presence here today testifies to the growing, ever closer cooperation between the two Organizations.

The end of the cold war gave a new impetus to the United Nations. At the same time, it gave a completely new dimension and importance to the role of regional organizations and arrangements in international affairs. Regional organizations got the opportunity to share the burden of maintaining peace and stability within their own regions. The world and regions that had been defined by division and antagonisms got the chance to unite in peace, economic development and common values.

OSCE is a very good example of the kind of regional organization that seized the opportunity to become an entity that fosters cooperation and development, democratization, human rights and peace. It cooperates with and complements the United Nations as a regional arrangement in the sense of Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter. As such, it provides an important link between European and global security. We believe that the future of world peace and security depends to a large extent on the comprehensive cooperation of the United Nations with the regional organizations. In this regard, we would welcome the enhanced cooperation of the Security Council with the relevant regional arrangements.

OSCE increasingly contributes to the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security in Europe through activities in early warning and preventive diplomacy, crisis management, arms control and disarmament, post-crisis stabilization and rehabilitation measures, and efforts in support of economic development and promoting respect for human rights within the OSCE area.

For each and every one of the listed aspects, OSCE and the United Nations have developed mutually beneficial cooperation, which has proven to be very effective in easing and solving different regional crises. OSCE is the one European organization that possesses specific comparative advantages in the areas of preventive diplomacy, conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation. It is well positioned to tackle the root causes of tensions and has a clear mandate for assisting the settlement of domestic conflicts. Its cooperative methods can be successful in conflict prevention. OSCE is developing an inventory of effective instruments and is accumulating experience, expertise and an understanding of specific problems. The activities of the High Commissioner on National Minorities; the preventive and mediating action of OSCE missions in the field; the experience in election monitoring and law-drafting assistance of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights; and arms-control negotiation capability are just a few examples.

We wish to emphasize that the High Commissioner on National Minorities has already proved, in a number of specific situations, the advantages of the early involvement of the international community in situations which could lead to international frictions and disputes. His work is firmly based on the internationally agreed standards of human rights and his advice to the interested Governments is a valuable example of successful preventive diplomacy.

Lessons learned from Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina prove that the existing international and regional organizations possess tools that are efficient for preventive and post-conflict engagement, on the condition that they are applied in a concerted, timely and proper manner. As a part of OSCE and United Nations activities, Slovenia actively participated in the international efforts related to these two situations. In the period from April to August this year, Slovenia participated in Operation Alba, which was successfully led by Italy and authorized by the Security Council.

Albania could be cited as a success story of the Security Council's mandated preventive action and the OSCE-led political and democratic rehabilitation. We commend the Albanian people and Government for their efforts to return the country to stability and to concentrate on what Albanians need most: the strengthening of democratic institutions and economic development.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a case of mixed conflict prevention and post-conflict activities of multiple international organizations. In September this year, OSCE organized an international seminar in Slovenia on cooperation between the international organizations and institutions, concentrating on experiences from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The participants agreed that, taking into account the very complex and not yet stable post-conflict situation in the country, international organizations, the United Nations and OSCE among them, perform their work with good, albeit not yet irreversibly established, results. Their main objectives are to help people of the country to strengthen peace, restore the conditions for coexistence, start economic reconstruction, supervise the reform of democratic institutions and build confidence among the parties.

The activities of international organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina deserve our full recognition. In order to ensure that these efforts succeed and that the present results are translated into a situation of durable peace and security, it is vital that the current international military presence be maintained in Bosnia and Herzegovina after June 1998. The level of security achieved so far is vital for the future consolidation of peace.

In saying this, I should also stress that additional arrangements for the preservation of a unified Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as for the inviolability of borders and for ensuring respect for the rights of national minorities, should be provided by the international community and its organizations. We believe that this is one of the areas in which the United Nations and OSCE should cooperate in the future.

Mr. Abelian (Armenia): Allow me first to take this opportunity to welcome Mr. Giancarlo Aragona, Secretary-General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The dramatic changes that the world has gone through during the past decade have created new opportunities for cooperation among nations, while also posing new threats. This dichotomy makes cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations all the more urgent in order both to seize the emerging opportunities and to meet the challenges facing the world community.

We support the advancement of the role of OSCE as a major forum addressing the challenges in the region through preventive diplomacy, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. In this respect, we view the Lisbon Declaration on a Common and Comprehensive Security Model for Europe for the twenty-first century as an important instrument for creating a peaceful, stable and prosperous Europe.

The strength and attraction of OSCE lie in the fact that it was formed as a community of shared values. It was this promise and our commitment to these values that brought us together in this Organization. Indeed, our membership places upon us responsibilities and obligations to meet certain demands and maintain standards, which also naturally correspond to our national interests.

Security in Europe is comprehensive and indivisible. At the heart of this concept are the fundamental values and common destiny with which the European identity is defined. It was this identity that helped the peoples of Europe 50 years ago to commit themselves to the process of building a renewed and prosperous community.

Among the challenges that OSCE faces today are those of resolving the ethnic conflicts that erupted after the end of the cold war and of preventing future ones. One of the tasks that OSCE is mandated with today is to reach a peaceful resolution to the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. This conflict is also Armenia's main foreign policy preoccupation, which, despite the maintenance of the ceasefire for almost four years, continues to threaten peace and stability in our region. We appreciate and commend the efforts of the co-Chairmen of the Minsk Conference to reach a peaceful resolution acceptable to all the parties to the conflict.

Mr. Ngo Quang Xuan (Viet Nam), Vice-President, took the Chair.

As part of any compromise solution, however, the commonly recognized freedoms of the Nagorny Karabakh population, their physical security and control over their territory and destiny must be guaranteed. These agreement-based obligations must be secured by measures that will make the peace process irreversible and disallow the resumption of military actions. It is our strong belief that a resolution acceptable to all the parties involved is the key to establishing durable peace and stability in the region and stimulating economic growth and prosperity in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorny Karabakh.

Armenia remains committed to a negotiated settlement of the conflict and will continue to be constructively engaged in the peace process. However, we urge Azerbaijan to negotiate directly with the elected officials of Nagorny Karabakh, for we strongly believe that no final solution can be achieved without Nagorny Karabakh's direct participation in the deliberations on its own political status.

Let me stress that Armenia fully supports the draft resolution presented by the Chairman-in-Office, contained in document A/52/L.38.

To conclude, I would like to express our appreciation to the Permanent Representative of Denmark and his delegation for the excellent work done during their term as Chairman-in-Office of OSCE, and we look forward to working closely with the delegation of Poland, the incoming Chairman-in-Office.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/5 of 13 October 1993, I now call on the Observer for and Secretary-General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Ambassador Aragona.

Mr. Aragona (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) (*interpretation from French*): The Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Niels Helveg Petersen, referred several months ago to the important achievements of the Organization under his chairmanship. There have been others since then, and as the end of the year approaches, I would like to take stock of our activities and sketch out broadly the prospects for 1998.

Two days ago OSCE successfully concluded in Bosnia and Herzegovina one of the most sensitive operations it has had to carry out: the supervision of elections to the Assembly of the Republika Srpska. It thereby laid a new stone in the process of building peace in the region. That election illustrated the capacity of OSCE to carry out large-scale operations in a very short period of time, since barely two months elapsed between the balloting and the decision of the Permanent Council authorizing it to act. The Mission in Sarajevo and the secretariat had to cope with this new task when they had just completed the monitoring of the municipal elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina and were working to implement the results.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was the major challenge facing OSCE in 1997, as it was in 1996. In addition to monitoring the elections, it worked to strengthen democracy and respect for human rights, as well as regional stability, in accordance with articles II and IV of the Dayton-Paris agreements. It will continue to work in these areas in 1998 and to carry out the missions assigned to it by the Dayton-Paris agreements, in coordination with the High Representative for the Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina and the international organizations present in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nothing would have been possible without close coordination between their on-site representatives, and in particular coordination with the Stabilization Force (SFOR), which did more than provide security and the necessary logistical support for our operations. It thereby demonstrated the extent to which its presence and action, adapted to the development of the situation, were indispensable for the consolidation of peace.

Likewise, in Albania OSCE welcomes the essential contribution of the multinational force authorized by the Security Council. Operation Alba ensured a climate of security and also gave its support to humanitarian assistance and the fulfilment of the political mission of the personal representative of the Chairman-in-Office of OSCE.

The Albanian crisis represented an important period for OSCE. The original nature of the crisis led the international community to respond in an innovative fashion, particularly regarding cooperation between intergovernmental institutions. OSCE very quickly established a coordination framework open to all these organizations in order to permit the simultaneous execution of tasks in an efficient, economical and synergistic manner. This framework worked to the satisfaction of all.

The Albanian crisis also allowed for testing the value of phased intervention by the international community to restore peace, an approach that is becoming traditional. Elections were held to provide the population once again with leaders in whom it could have confidence and whom it would not oppose by violence. After that stage of emergency intervention, a long-term assistance programme in the economical, political, and social fields was established to consolidate the investment made in the future of Albania by the international community. OSCE then reduced its presence and adapted it to its new mission, while continuing to provide the other actors a coordination framework.

Croatia is of particular interest in terms of cooperation between the United Nations and OSCE. Given the prospects for the conclusion of the mandate of the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES) next 15 January, OSCE decided last June to expand and strengthen its long-term mission in Croatia by adapting its deployment timetable to that of the withdrawal of the United Nations. Its mission in Zagreb received an additional mandate to promote and monitor the implementation of the commitments undertaken by the Croatian Government regarding the return of refugees and displaced persons on two fronts and the protection of their rights, as well as those of persons belonging to national minorities.

This transition between two missions with very different characteristics and responsibilities was preceded by numerous contacts in the field, as well as at the headquarters of the organizations, in order to make it as smooth as possible. The Transitional Administrator was in Vienna for that purpose just a few days ago. He had previously announced that the Croatian authorities would propose that the United Nations police force be maintained beyond 15 January, and this request of the Zagreb Government was then transmitted to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

OSCE can only welcome this initiative. The mission in Croatia will unquestionably be one of the central concerns of OSCE in 1998. The United Nations is also greatly interested in its success, not only because the United Nations is concerned with everything involving peace and respect for human rights, but also because the mission will demonstrate that the universal Organization was right to pass the baton to our regional organization.

OSCE and the United Nations have devised ways of cooperating in other areas as well. This cooperation is not merely for large-scale missions. For my part, during all my travels I try to foster exchanges of information and coordination between locally represented organizations. Indeed, pragmatic cooperation based on respect for competencies and for the expertise of each organization has become the rule and is no longer the exception. Nevertheless, it can still be further strengthened. Thus the human rights office opened by the United Nations in Sukhumi, Georgia, nearly a year ago includes a United Nations officer and a member of the OSCE mission in Georgia.

In Tajikistan, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the head of the OSCE mission remain in continual contact. Our mission has thus taken up from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees the task of protecting repatriated persons in the south. In Tajikistan, whenever necessary, the OSCE provides support to the United Nations, whether this involves participating in the guarantees of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord; supporting the programme of reconciliation and democratization; or contributing to the preparation, and participating in, the donors' conference currently under way in Vienna. It is also ready, together with the United Nations, to render its assistance in monitoring the elections planned for next year.

I should like here to pay tribute to the staff of the international organizations that have been working under difficult conditions, in particular in terms of security, in Tajikistan and in other areas.

In Tajikistan and in Abkhazia, Georgia, the OSCE is supporting United Nations efforts to restore peace. In other countries or regions, the OSCE is the principal protagonist in the search for solutions to disputes — if not the sole protagonist, as in Chechnya. This is the case in Moldova, in Georgia — for South Ossetia — and with respect to the conflict with which the Minsk conference is dealing. The resolution adopted by the latter could lead to an important innovation for the OSCE. With the culmination of the efforts of the co-Chairmen, the organization will for the first time be exercising a peacekeeping function in the sense of a regional arrangement as set out in Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations.

While cooperation in the field between our organizations was strengthened during the past year, as was made clear by the representatives of United Nations agencies — including Mrs. Rehn, Mr. Bota, Mr. Merrem and Mr. Walker — who addressed the Permanent Council of OSCE, cooperation between the headquarters of our organizations has also made progress. The OSCE recently met in Vienna with the United Nations and the Council of Europe on the situation in the Caucasus. On 23 January 1998, it will chair the annual meeting between the Chairmen-in-Office and the Secretaries General of the OSCE and the Council of Europe and the heads of the Geneva-based United Nations agencies. To facilitate the participation of the latter, the OSCE has proposed that this meeting be held in Geneva.

This past year has provided numerous examples of the OSCE's contribution to stability and peace in Europe, not only by providing timely responses to new conflicts but also by discharging the longer-term mandates entrusted to it by its member States.

In the area of arms control, OSCE member States have undertaken to review the Vienna Document 1994 of the Negotiations on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures. The implementation of the code of conduct dealing with the political and military aspects of security was the subject of a follow-up conference in Vienna as well as of national seminars designed for the military.

Other long-term tasks also lie ahead. The OSCE's philosophy is that the exercise of democracy and respect for human rights are necessary to prevent conflicts, be they internal or inter-State. The OSCE believes that the human dimension is an essential element of security, and it is in this framework that the Permanent Council decided to establish the advisory observer group in Belarus.

In addition, the role played by the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in the areas of early warning and preventive diplomacy was reinforced last year. Together with our mission in Sarajevo and our presence in Tirana, the Warsaw office participated in election-monitoring operations that demonstrated the close interrelationship between the freedom to vote, democracy and the re-establishment of security. The office also carried out significant election-monitoring operations, in particular in Serbia and Montenegro.

The OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly has played an important role in all of the organization's election-related activities. The support of those elected representatives for all of our activities means that our organization is not limited to diplomats and international officials but involves also civil society, as was the wish of its founders in Helsinki.

In 1998, the OSCE will need to build up further its capacity to prevent conflicts and human rights violations. Its member States have provided it with two new instruments for that purpose: a Representative on Freedom of the Media and a coordinator of economic and environmental activities. The latter's mission is to strengthen the OSCE's capacity to consider the economic, social and environmental aspects of security without, however, the organization's becoming an economic and financial body. Indeed, the Albanian crisis demonstrated that the economic aspect of security cannot be overlooked.

In accordance with the Lisbon Declaration on a Common and Comprehensive Security Model for Europe for the Twenty-first Century, the OSCE will make an effort to strengthen cooperation and complementarity between European and trans-Atlantic organizations. The ministerial conference to be held in three weeks in Copenhagen, which will close the Danish chairmanship, should, *inter alia*, devise ways of making progress in the definition of a security model, including the platform for cooperative security designed to define the modalities for cooperation between the OSCE and other security organizations.

In Copenhagen, member States will also have to adopt a new financing mechanism for large-scale OSCE operations. This will keep us from having to devote a great deal of energy to urgent searches for ad hoc voluntary financing and thereby strengthen the effectiveness of the agency, as will the adaptation measures for the secretariat that I have proposed to the member States.

With these considerable accomplishments, Denmark's chairmanship of the organization will come to an end. Poland will succeed Denmark. The presence of the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Geremek, at the last ministerial troika on the very day he was sworn in bodes well regarding the personal interest he will bring to discharging the mandate of his chairmanship.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.

United Nations

A/52/PV.55

General Assembly
Fifty-second Session

Official Records

55th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 25 November 1997, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Udovenko .... (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 4.45 p.m.

Agenda item 40 (*continued*)

Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Report of the Secretary-General (A/52/450)

Draft resolution (A/52/L.38)

Amendment (A/52/L.39)

The President: I call on the representative of Armenia, who wishes to make a proposal.

Mr. Abelian (Armenia): My delegation would like to make a motion of no action under rule 74 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly on the amendment [A/52/L.39] proposed by the delegation of Azerbaijan to draft resolution A/52/L.38, entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe". We make this proposal for the following reasons: the common interpretations and definitions used by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are based on decisions taken by consensus among the delegations of OSCE member States during meetings at various levels, namely OSCE summits, and meetings of the OSCE Council of Ministers, the OSCE Senior Council, the Committee of Senior Officials, and so forth. They express the common position of all Member States of OSCE and are based on the awareness of the necessity to guarantee balance and objectivity in the OSCE Minsk Group mediation efforts.

The amendment proposed by Azerbaijan is one-sided and biased, and it imposes a compulsory framework to which Armenia cannot agree. Being an obvious attempt to predetermine the outcome of the Copenhagen meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, this amendment in fact rejects the language proposed by the Chairman-in-Office.

We view this as an inappropriate move, since OSCE is the sole mandated and authoritative body dealing with the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. For this obvious reason, the sponsors did not find it appropriate to include the amendment proposed by Azerbaijan in the draft resolution.

The delegation of Armenia fully supports the draft resolution presented by the Chairman-in-Office this morning. Therefore, my delegation regrets to state that Azerbaijan has failed to take into account the arguments I have just mentioned.

The delegation of Armenia dissociates itself from any interpretation of language which contradicts the decisions agreed upon by consensus in OSCE among its members.

Having said that, I would like to make a motion of no action, and I call upon Member States to vote in favour of this motion.

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

The President: The representative of Armenia has moved within the terms of rule 74 of the rules of procedure that no action be taken on the amendment contained in document A/52/L.39. I would like to remind the Assembly that rule 74 reads as follows:

> "During the discussion of any matter, a representative may move the adjournment of the debate on the item under discussion. In addition to the proposer of the motion, two representatives may speak in favour of, and two against, the motion, after which the motion shall be immediately put to the vote."

I call on the representative of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Kouliev (Azerbaijan) (*interpretation from Russian*): As was the case last year, the delegation of Armenia has once again put forward a procedural measure — a motion of no action — thus attempting to deprive us of the possibility of defending our highest national interests. The delegation of Azerbaijan is categorically opposed to this. Azerbaijan has not made and does not make any claims to anyone else's territory, but neither will it permit any kind of encroachment on its own territory.

The Nagorny Karabakh region is an integral part of the Azerbaijani Republic. As a United Nations Member State, Azerbaijan must not be deprived of its legitimate right to express its view on a question which is so important for its own destiny. In protecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity, Azerbaijan must not be deprived of the opportunity to propose an amendment for consideration by the General Assembly. At its fifty-first session, the General Assembly rejected this procedural measure.

We call upon Member States, as we did last year, to vote against the motion of no action proposed by Armenia.

The President: If no other delegation wishes to speak on this issue, I shall now put to the vote the motion submitted by the representative of Armenia that no action be taken on the amendment contained in document A/52/L.39, which is an amendment submitted by Azerbaijan to the draft resolution contained in document A/52/L.38.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Armenia

Against:

Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Guyana, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Senegal, Singapore, Sudan, Swaziland, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Yemen

Abstaining:

Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Latvia, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Marshall Islands, Monaco, Mongolia, Myanmar, Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Venezuela, Zambia, Zimbabwe

The motion was rejected by 29 votes to 1, with 81 abstentions.

The President: Since the motion of no action has not been adopted, we shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/52/L.38 and the amendment contained in document A/52/L.39.

Since there are no speakers in explanation of vote before the voting, we shall now proceed to take a decision on draft resolution A/52/L.38 and on the amendment thereto, contained in document A/52/L.39.

In accordance with rule 90 of the rules of procedure, the amendment is voted on first. The

Assembly shall therefore take a decision first on the amendment circulated in document A/52/L.39.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Swaziland, Sweden, Tajikistan, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Yemen

Against:

Armenia

Abstaining:

Antigua and Barbuda, El Salvador, Estonia, Jamaica, Latvia, Marshall Islands, Myanmar, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Singapore, South Africa, Togo

The amendment was adopted by 104 votes to 1, with 17 abstentions.

The President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/52/L.38 as a whole, as amended.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Swaziland, Sweden, Tajikistan, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:

None

Abstaining:

Armenia

Draft resolution A/52/L.38, as amended, was adopted by 126 votes to none, with 1 abstention (resolution 52/22).

The President: Before giving the floor to speakers in explanation of vote after the vote, may I remind representatives that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Sychou (Belarus) (*interpretation from Russian*): The delegation of the Republic of Belarus, acting in a spirit of compromise and mutual understanding, broadly supported draft resolution A/52/L.38 and at this stage will not insist on the adoption of our amendments to many of its provisions. We should also like to thank those delegations that expressed a readiness to sponsor those amendments.

At the same time, we must focus the attention of the General Assembly on the clear imbalance between several points stressed by draft resolution L.38 regarding basic areas for the pan-European process, and the clear slant in favour of including in the draft resolution only the decisions of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In this regard the delegation of Belarus does not consider that it is advisable for the United Nations General Assembly to be involved in issues of micromanagement with regard to the purely internal competence of regional organizations.

In this context, we affirm our readiness to implement the decision of the Permanent Council of the OSCE to establish an Advisory and Monitoring Group of the OSCE in Belarus based on mutually acceptable conditions. We believe that it is premature for the General Assembly to take note of this decision, given that the negotiating process is continuing and consultations are taking place between the Government of Belarus and the OSCE on the memorandum on understanding to implement that decision of the Permanent Council of the OSCE.

In future, we intend to continue to base our position on the fact that decisions adopted regarding areas of interaction between the United Nations and the OSCE, as in the case of interaction between the United Nations and all other regional organizations, can yield tangible results only when they cover the entire range of the most important spheres of competence of each of them and are supported by all Member States.

Miss Lucas (Luxembourg) (*interpretation from French*): The European Union regrets that once again it has not been possible to adopt this resolution by consensus. The resolution is part of a series of resolutions dealing with cooperation between the United Nations and various international or regional organizations. The European Union would also have preferred the focus of our discussion to have been on strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and on the coordination of their activities. With regard to the substance of the question addressed in the amendment introduced by the Republic of Azerbaijan, the European Union can only repeat its earlier comment, made in the general debate: the principles that should lead to a settlement respecting the dignity and interests of the parties to the conflict in Nagorny Karabakh are well-known; they are clearly defined in the framework of the OSCE. We appeal to the parties to pursue their negotiations in the framework of the Minsk Process. The States members of the European Union, as co-sponsors of the draft resolution introduced by the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, would have preferred reaching a consensus on maintaining paragraph 16 as it was. The amendment proposed by Azerbaijan, however, reverts to the language adopted last year by the General Assembly. The European Union therefore joined with the Co-Chairmen of the Minsk Conference by voting in favour of A/52/L.39.

Mr. Abelian (Armenia): My delegation voted against the amendment proposed by the delegation of Azerbaijan and abstained on the resolution as a whole for the following reasons. The initial proposal put forward by the Chairman-in-Office was very balanced and was dictated by the need to create a more favourable environment for the peace process on the eve of the Copenhagen ministerial meeting. The United Nations should not have second-guessed the language proposed by the Chairman-in-Office, since the OSCE is the sole mandated and authoritative body dealing with the Nagorny Karabakh conflict.

We are surprised that the States members of the OSCE, including the members of the European Union, voted in favour of the Azerbaijani amendment, given that they earlier sponsored the proposed draft. In this respect we are particularly disappointed by the decision of the Co-Chairmen of the Minsk Group to support this amendment. The position of the Minsk Group Co-Chairmen countries to vote in favour of the Azerbaijani amendment undermines and dismisses the initial proposal of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office.

We are convinced that any attempt to predetermine the final status of Nagorny Karabakh will continue to have a negative effect on the peace process, as did the Lisbon Declaration, not only making the commencement of negotiations on Nagorny Karabakh difficult, but also making the signing of an interim agreement between the parties to the conflict highly unlikely. However, Armenia remains committed to the peace process and will continue to be constructively engaged in negotiations to reach a peaceful resolution to the conflict based on goodwill and mutual compromise.

Mr. Dlamini (Swaziland): My delegation wholeheartedly supported this resolution. This support emanated from the belief that the regional organization should truly be given support by the United Nations. This is in the spirit of the Charter itself, which advocates, for both regional and subregional organizations, the resolution of existing conflicts and also the economic problems which normally beset our subregions.

Furthermore, my delegation humbly implores the group affected by the resolution to endeavour to sit around a regional conference table to resolve any problems. I say to those concerned: "Quarrelling with your brother, misunderstanding the language of your brother, has no place nowadays". Therefore, I humbly request that in future before they come to the Assembly they try to overcome any difficulty and not interrupt as we take action on such draft resolutions.

Let us turn the weapons of the cold war into a machinery for development, a mechanism for creating sacred vows on peace and security, so that any future draft resolution can be adopted by consensus, like the one on relations between the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations. I urge my friends, my brothers and sisters, to bury their hatchets and learn to love one another, so that they do not waste time and energy which they need for sustainable economic development.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote. I call on the representative of Estonia, who wishes to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Velliste (Estonia): I should like to clarify the Estonian Government's position on a matter raised this morning by the representative of the Russian Federation.

Estonia has consistently supported cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in a wide range of matters.

In this regard, I would specifically like to clarify that the OSCE agenda does not contain an issue of human rights in Estonia. However, the Estonian Government has developed close relations with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in addressing problems caused by the collapse of the Soviet empire and directly resulting from Soviet occupation. These concern activities of integrating an alien population into Estonian society. It is widely believed that Estonia has succeeded in making good progress towards this end.

Finally, I wish to recall that, by a consensual decision, the General Assembly at its fifty-first session welcomed the fruitful cooperation of the Government of Estonia with the OSCE.

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 40?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 23

Multilingualism

Report of the Secretary-General (A/52/577)

Draft resolution (A/52/L.35)

The President: I give the floor to the representative of France to introduce draft resolution A/52/L.35.

Mr. Thiébaud (France) *(interpretation from French):* Since the adoption of the United Nations Charter, Article 111 of which states that the texts in the various languages are equally authentic, we have continually tried to maintain parity in the official languages and working languages of the various bodies.

It is this use of several languages, on the basis of equality, that we call multilingualism, and that we wish today to continue to support.

Equal treatment by the United Nations of the official languages and working languages is a major factor in harmonious international life, enriched by the promotion of the diversity of cultures.

We need a great deal of determination to follow the rule — respect for the principle of equality of languages. The purpose of resolution 50/11, adopted by the General Assembly in 1995, was to ensure that respect.

The efforts which have been made should be acknowledged, and we gladly recognize them, particularly given the Secretary-General's personal dedication to multilingualism. However, these efforts must be pursued and intensified. We hope that measures will be taken, as indicated in paragraph 2 of the report, to support the study of official languages and

> "to ensure that languages learned can be used in the working environment and to promote respect for the Organization's linguistic and cultural diversity".

Any circular or other instruction aimed at the full implementation of the principles recalled in resolution 50/11 would be useful in this respect.

Similarly, we would hope to see implementation of the idea expressed in paragraph 9 of the report, that to promote multilingualism the Secretariat encourage staff members to make equal use of the working languages in their official communications. It seems to us that such encouragement would be more convincing when it concerned promotion prospects.

The full implementation of resolution 50/11 requires specific results for all the subjects mentioned in it, whether knowledge of official languages as a factor in promotion; equality of working languages within the Secretariat; the training or recruitment of specialists guaranteeing the proper and timely translation of documents into the different official languages, in order to ensure simultaneous distribution; the availability of data banks in the different official languages; and the teaching, at all levels, of the official languages and the working languages of the Secretariat.

That is why we are requesting the Secretary-General to report to us again at the fifty-fourth session on his continued efforts, and their results, to implement all the principles set out in resolution 50/11.

I have described the purpose of the draft resolution, whose subject, as demonstrated by the list of sponsors is one to which many Member States attach importance. They give it their deepest attention, reflecting their commitment to the diversity of cultures for which the United Nations provides a forum.

The adoption of the draft resolution will help us in this respect. The delegation of France commends the draft resolution to all delegations and thanks them for their support, which we hope and expect will be unanimous.

Mr. Young (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Arias (Spain) (*interpretation from Spanish*): It gives particular satisfaction to the delegation of Spain today to speak on this agenda item, entitled "Multilingualism".

I wish to recall that during the fiftieth session, Spain, together with the other member States of the Ibero-American Conference, played a particularly active role in the efforts which led first to the inclusion of this item on the agenda of that session and later to the adoption of resolution 50/11.

My country felt that the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of our Organization gave us the ideal opportunity to reaffirm the universality on which the United Nations is based, and, as a corollary, to confirm the principle of multilingualism, the expression and fundamental instrument of dialogue between Member States. For Spain, which has established language pluralism as one of the guiding principles of its own society, support for and strengthening the use of the various official languages in our work and deliberations is of the utmost importance.

For its part, the General Assembly, in adopting resolution 50/11 by a large majority, recognized the need strictly to apply the language regime established with respect both to the working languages of the Secretariat and to the six official languages and working languages of the General Assembly, its Committees and subcommittees, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council.

At this session, we are again discussing multilingualism, in the light of the report [A/52/577] submitted by the Secretary-General to Member States pursuant to paragraph 10 of resolution 50/11.

This debate could not be more timely. If the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, which has already been dubbed the "reform Assembly", is to provide an opportunity for all Member States to try to prepare our Organization for the challenges of the next millennium, so that it can shoulder its responsibilities more efficiently, we should register our continued interest in carrying on studying in depth the proper implementation of the language regime of our Organization. We must be particularly aware that the existing language regime strengthens the relevance of the role of the Organization, not only because it allows for richer contributions to our deliberations, but also because it enables our respective publics to identify with our tasks.

My delegation therefore wishes to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report, which we have studied carefully. In the various aspects covered it seeks to respond to many of the issues raised in resolution 50/11. However, as a whole, it gives only a static analysis of the present situation. My delegation's assessment of the report confirms our view that implementation of the existing language regime calls for a more detailed analysis and the continued attention of Member States and the Secretariat.

Questions such as the recruitment of staff who have a command of and can use the working languages, training in the official and working languages, the translation of documents and the timely strengthening of interpretation services require an appropriate follow-up in order to meet the demand on such an important matter.

That is why the delegation of Spain became one of the sponsors of the draft resolution that has just been introduced by the representative of France. My delegation is confident that it will enjoy the full support of the General Assembly.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the conviction of the delegation of Spain as to the importance of the current language regime as a way of putting the universal character of our Organization into practice.

Mr. Minoves-Triquell (Andorra) (*interpretation from French*): Andorra is a fervent advocate of multilingualism. The official language of my country is Catalan, which has been our language since time immemorial. However, the people of Andorra also have a good grasp of French and Spanish, the languages spoken in neighbouring States. This openness to other languages is not only economic openness, which allows our tradespeople to understand the requests of tourists, but also a also great cultural openness that we want to preserve. In our schools Catalan is insisted upon, but lessons are also given in French, Spanish and English. The preservation and advancement of our own language and culture do not preclude other languages and cultures.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

Andorra's special features make it natural for us to be one of the sponsors of draft resolution A/52/L.35 on multilingualism, which was introduced by France. I fully agree with what Mr. Thiébaud said this afternoon. United Nations promotion policy should take more account of the linguistic skills of staff members. If we want the United Nations to be a faithful reflection of the world's diversity, use of the official languages should be widespread. We should not penalize talented people for not knowing languages, but there is also a need to reward properly those staff members who make the effort to acquire fluency in various languages. We are pleased in his report of 6 November that the Secretary-General points out that languages are taught at duty stations. We should find the means to provide incentives for the use of these resources by all.

(*spoke in English*)

The initiative to encourage multilingualism at the United Nations must not be read as an expression by one or a few particular languages of a fear of losing ground in an increasingly unilingual world. Precisely because the world is more and more the ground for one *lingua franca*, we must endeavour to make people appreciate the wealth hidden in different languages, and the United Nations must be the first flag-bearer in this effort. An Organization that comprises 185 States cannot allow itself to slip into the convenience of using only one language.

(*spoke in Catalan; English text furnished by the delegation*)

The unity of action of our Organization must come from a convergence of diversity, never from uniformity. Without fear, we must make greater use of the languages at our disposal. Since our admission to the Organization in 1993, the Head of Government of Andorra has made all of his statements in the general debate in Catalan, our language, not with the goal of promoting nationalism, but in the desire to highlight the natural diversity of the cultures that can be found in this forum. This has always been done while providing a translation of the text, at very modest cost. Our message has been conveyed equally well. Andorra would like to encourage the other States to express themselves in their own language during the general debate. In this way we shall be aware of that great wealth of nations, their languages, as vehicles for the expression of human potentialities — without fear, and without hidden ideological intentions, but with the simplicity of a country that presents what is its own. We therefore advocate multilingualism at the United Nations, at the level of the working languages, the level of the official languages and, when possible, the level of all the languages of States.

Mr. Kaabachi (Tunisia) (*interpretation from French*): Tunisia is pleased to speak today on an item which it strongly supported for inclusion in the agenda of the General Assembly two years ago. It will be recalled that this item first appeared on the agenda at the time when the international community was solemnly commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations.

The statements made during the discussion on the agenda item on multilingualism on that occasion, and the resolution adopted then, clearly affirm the multilingual character of the United Nations. By returning to this question today, we pay tribute to the founding fathers of our Organization. The United Nations symbolizes the concrete expression of respect for and acceptance of others in all their diversity.

In reaffirming the multilingual character of the United Nations, we respect not only the spirit and the letter of the Charter but, above all, we take a positive step to counter totalitarian ideologies. The principles of the Organization, we should recall, stress, respect and call for the safeguarding of difference. Such respect for differences among individuals, which is at the very root of any democratic society, should be the fundamental principle of relations among States. Democracy, the practice of which, within our countries, is rightly considered to be both an obligation and a virtue, is no less important in international relations.

As we take up the subject of multilingualism, a committee of the whole of the General Assembly, under agenda item 157, is scrutinizing the reform of the Organization. As the title of the Secretary-General's report — "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" — indicates, that scrutiny is taking place from the perspective of renewal. The consideration of that question affords us an excellent opportunity for further reflection on the question of multilingualism in the United Nations, which is one of the important elements to be retained within the framework of this reform. This reminder of the importance of linguistic diversity in the United Nations is, in Tunisia's view, one of the main factors to be addressed in any overall reflection intended to contribute to the renewal of the United Nations and to imbue it with a new dynamism.

While the process of reflection on the future of the United Nations is far from being completed, and indeed is growing in scope and breadth, Tunisia hopes that the question of multilingualism will continue to arouse the interest it deserves in order to remain an important element of any draft which may be prepared or agreed with a view to increasing the efficiency and reach of the Organization.

Such reaffirmation of the international community's interest in recognizing and consolidating linguistic diversity should at the same time be accompanied by concrete acts and daily gestures to ensure a harmonious, mutually beneficial and fruitful coexistence among all cultures.

We believe that the principle of respect for the use of all official languages of the United Nations should be a simple fact, and should be put into practice in all meetings held by the Organization. No reason, however valid, should in our view be the pretext for a discriminatory usage that did not respect the wishes of Member States and disregarded the principles underlying the linguistic balance consecrated by the Organization's founding fathers.

In this context, we take note of the Secretary-General's report, contained in document A/52/577, on the question of multilingualism. We do not wish to comment on the content of the paragraphs dealing with the use of official languages in the Secretariat at the present stage, given that the relevant document was not available far enough in advance to allow us to study it closely. The paragraphs concerned, however, could be considered by the appropriate bodies, among them the Fifth Committee. My country's delegation will not fail to make its contribution in that context, so that the resolution on multilingualism is implemented in a satisfactory and effective way.

The paragraphs of the Secretary-General's report which I would like to comment on very briefly are those having to do with the work we carry out at the United Nations every day as delegations of Member States. The report considers the simultaneous distribution of documents to be satisfactory, but we would like, in this regard, to ask the Secretariat to respect the rules and decisions taken in this area. It should be recalled, in this connection, that during the current session documentation has rarely been available on time in the various working languages. The increasingly widespread use of a single language during this session has diminished our ability to work and to react quickly in the framework of negotiations and consultations, both formal and informal. To use the Secretary-General's formula, reform is not an event. Neither, in our view, is it an abstract formula. Reform should mean, above all, improvement in our working conditions so as to ensure greater participation, efficiency, transparency, and democracy. If we do not have documents in all the working languages at our disposal, our participation will frequently be lessened or non-existent.

Thus we hope that the reform to be undertaken will be accompanied by an improvement in the use of the official languages of the United Nations so that everyday practice in our work corresponded to the wishes of Member States and the rules they have established, particularly where respect for multilingualism is concerned.

We hope that by adopting a resolution on multilingualism in the General Assembly, the Member States will once again reaffirm their commitment to diversity and to the richness of cultures and civilizations, which are the fundamental guarantors of their authenticity but also of universality in the global village which our planet earth has become today.

Mr. Albin (Mexico) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Secretariat has prepared the report contained in document A/52/577 for the consideration of this agenda item. That report contains a very brief summary of the practices current in the various areas in which, in one way or another, the official and working languages play a part in the Organization's work.

Unfortunately, the report does not analyse the difficulties and problems encountered in the implementation of current arrangements, nor are specific recommendations made to provide a better service to delegations. In all sincerity, I must say that it appears that the Secretariat is satisfied with the current state of affairs. Apparently, the importance it attaches to multilingualism does not compare to the priority a vast majority of Member States attach to it.

(spoke in French)

The official languages are a privileged and essential instrument of communication. We are convinced that their use is vital to dialogue, negotiation and understanding between Members of the United Nations.

In the second half of the twentieth century the major political, ideological and economic contradictions in society have been discussed and very often resolved within this Organization.

(spoke in Spanish)

The community of nations has had a permanent, civilized forum for settling differences. The progress we have made has resulted from a genuine recognition of our shared destiny as human beings as well as — and this is equally important — an acceptance of our diversity.

For Mexico, the very strength of the United Nations lies in plurality and the excellent opportunities it offers for promoting understanding, convergence and unity of purpose. The priority we attach to multilingualism is not the result of an obsession; it is rooted in the deep conviction that if the Organization — its essence, its practices and its methods — reflect the potential that every culture offers, we will have a more efficient and more effective United Nations.

(spoke in English)

The importance of this item deserves deeper consideration. We therefore hope that the Secretariat can prepare a more analytical and more comprehensive report.

(spoke in French)

For the reasons I have given, the delegation of Mexico will vote in favour of draft resolution A/52/L.35.

Mr. Amehou (Benin) (*interpretation from French*): I am pleased to speak on behalf of the delegation of Benin on this agenda item, "Multilingualism".

Two years ago, in 1995, the General Assembly ended its debate on this agenda item with the adoption of resolution 50/11, in which the Assembly, *inter alia*, requested the Secretary-General to ensure the strict implementation of the resolutions establishing language arrangements for both the official languages and the working languages of the Secretariat.

The Secretary-General has undertaken many initiatives, ranging from the teaching of the official languages of the Organization and the working languages of the Secretariat to library services and data banks, including the use of working languages within the Secretariat, interpretation services for various meetings and the recruitment and training of translators.

My delegation commends those efforts by the Secretary-General, which are aimed at making the world Organization truly pluricultural. Indeed, plurality is a characteristic of any community, and it must be recognized and accepted as a manifestation of freedom.

Today, when science, technology, communication and computing are working profound changes both in the structure of knowledge and in individual and collective expectations, it is of prime importance that we bear in mind that the universal culture of the third millennium will depend on the contribution of all cultures. With that in mind, Benin has again joined many other delegations in sponsoring this year's draft resolution on multilingualism, draft resolution A/52/L.35.

Our aim is to restore respect for the principle of the equality of the official languages of the Organization and the working languages of the Secretariat — in short, to ensure that the principle of the diversity of languages and cultures within the United Nations system is acknowledged and complied with. For language has an impact far beyond mere communication. It validates cultural heritage and past intellectual experience. Language as a tool for thought is both the means and the end of culture.

That is why we believe that, at a time when new avenues for international cooperation and social progress are being laid out, it is important that all those involved be able to contribute to the development and establishment of the principles that will underpin international relations. This change can be dynamic and produce significant results only if the force behind it is respectful of cultural identity and its elements, protects pluralism and draws sustenance from the wealth inherent in that diversity. Only thus can its great ideals enjoy the broadest possible support.

The United Nations is the only universal forum for dialogue, consultation and negotiation. It should be our ambition to encourage strict respect for the right to make ourselves understood and to understand others, for proper understanding of the questions under discussion is the guarantee of an ever broader and more productive participation.

I should like to highlight the importance we attach to this draft resolution by emphasizing that today the protagonists in international life are growing in number and diversity. It is therefore urgent that we act to promote an ever broader democratization in international life.

We believe that the potential for self-expression and participation contributes to that democratization, with the taking into account of the points of view and concerns of the silent: those who are reduced to silence or those who remain silent because they cannot participate actively in debates or make proper use of the documentation available to them.

For all those reasons, my delegation appreciates the work done by the Secretary-General in implementation of resolution 50/11. Nothing is perfect; by its very nature, any human endeavour is capable of improvement. Benin therefore calls for renewed efforts by the Secretariat to give this privileged instrument of the work of our Organization its full weight.

The time has come for our Assembly to reach a decision along these lines, based on the Secretary-General's proposals for the renewal of the Organization, and to ensure that all aspects of the question are covered.

In conclusion, I would like to express the hope that, in the light of all that I have said, and everything that previous speakers have said, the Assembly will adopt draft resolution A/52/L.35 by consensus.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

Before proceeding to take action on draft resolution A/52/L.35, I should like to announce that since its introduction the following countries have become sponsors: Afghanistan, Argentina, Belarus, Cameroon, China, Djibouti, Germany, Greece, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Kazakhstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mauritania, Peru, Turkmenistan and Venezuela.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/52/L.35?

Draft resolution A/52/L.35 was adopted (resolution 52/23)

The Acting President: Before calling on speakers in explanation of position, may I remind members that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Watanabe (Japan): My delegation reluctantly joined the consensus on the draft resolution, for the following reason.

Two years ago, on 2 November 1995, when resolution 50/11 was adopted, my delegation voted against it, since operative paragraph 3 penalizes staff members whose mother tongue is not one of the official languages of the United Nations. This is a discriminatory measure against those countries whose mother tongue is not one of the six official languages, and Japan considers that paragraph unacceptable. Therefore, my delegation reserves the right to intervene, if necessary, at any future stage regarding this resolution on multilingualism.

Although my delegation respects the idea of multilingualism in the United Nations, it would request the Secretary-General to treat equally in matters of recruitment or promotion those United Nations staff whose mother tongue is not one of the official languages of the United Nations.

Mr. Chinvanno (Thailand): My delegation wishes to make it clear that while we joined the consensus on draft resolution A/52/L.35 under this agenda item, "Multilingualism", we continue to have strong reservations regarding operative paragraph 3 of resolution 50/11, which my delegation voted against in 1995. In our view, this paragraph has grave implications for personnel matters. In practical terms, requiring a command of two of the six official languages would place at a serious disadvantage personnel and potential recruits whose mother tongue is not one of the six official languages of the Organization.

Thailand wishes to reaffirm its commitment to multilingualism at the United Nations and to support the idea that the United Nations should promote cultural diversity. But Thailand believes that the promotion of cultural diversity has as its central ideal the concepts of tolerance and understanding, which, in the context of this agenda item, should be extended to those cultures that as a result of forces of history are not associated with the six official languages of this Organization.

Mr. Dlamini (Swaziland): Like the preceding speakers, my delegation wishes to put on record that two years ago we observed that such a resolution deprives Member States of what is otherwise their quota in the United Nations Secretariat. I have especially in mind those countries in the southern part of Africa and in Asia where the languages that are seemingly gaining popularity at the United Nations have never been part of our history. The question, therefore, becomes: will the United Nations — here I refer to paragraph 3 of the report — also expedite training programmes in those countries where French, Spanish, Chinese and Arabic have never been used?

If not, we are seriously concerned that this is a way of trying to marginalize those countries that have never been exposed to the languages in question. The delegation of Swaziland categorically stressed in 1995 that the United Nations had a duty to include in the curricular systems of those countries opportunities to learn all the languages that are used at the United Nations. Otherwise, my delegation may find itself advocating that the Swazi language, which is my language, should be one of the languages used here. And, Mr. Acting President, your language — which is a tribal language — may also be seen to be fighting to find its way to the United Nations. One would like to feel that this is the United Nations — with the emphasis on "United". We own the United Nations, as Member States. Therefore, those who piloted the resolution adopted today should know that they have acted unfairly, especially since it was not put to a vote, as was the case in the past.

Nonetheless, my delegation is willing to change its original position, with the hope that opportunities will be made available.

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 23?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 27

Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin

Report by the Secretary-General (A/52/211)

Draft resolution (A/52/L.12)

The Acting President: On behalf of the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, allow me to make a few brief remarks on agenda item 27, entitled "Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin".

This item is a good example of the tremendous breadth and diversity of issues before this General Assembly. This very delicate and sensitive issue, as members know, has a long history. Ancient historical texts contain evidence that, since time immemorial, the laws of war included the right to booty. Pillaging was part and parcel of military campaigns as the conquered countries were sacked for treasures while the museums of invaders were filled with the spoils of war.

But there were also examples of a quite different nature. We may recall the action taken by Scipio Africanus back in the second century B.C. After taking Carthage in the course of the Third Punic War, he decided to return to Sicily the wealth that had been taken from it as a result of repeated pillaging by the Carthaginians.

During the past years, the international community has shown increased interest in the issue of cultural property. This has found its reflection in special conventions of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the activities of the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation. Amid growing appeals for the preservation of the collective memory incarnated in historic and cultural achievements, there is obviously a need for enhanced cooperation among States in the sphere of the return and restitution of cultural property. A constructive dialogue on this issue at the current session will be an important step towards reaching that goal.

I give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to introduce draft resolution A/52/L.12.

Mr. Mwamba Kapanga (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*interpretation from French*): On behalf of the delegations of Azerbaijan, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, China, Cyprus, the Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Mali, Mongolia, Niger, Peru and Rwanda and of my own delegation, I have the honour of introducing the draft resolution contained in document A/52/L.12 under agenda item 27, entitled "Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin".

My delegation is pleased to inform the Assembly that Colombia, the Republic of Korea, Afghanistan, Bolivia and Turkey have become sponsors of the draft resolution.

The item on the return of cultural property is regularly debated by our Assembly. To be sure, since its introduction in 1972, we have witnessed rather timid implementations of various resolutions. Indeed, the promises made by countries holding cultural treasures, which are indispensable to the preservation and growth of cultural values, have not been fully kept. Hence the great importance of the Medellín Declaration for Cultural Diversity and Tolerance and the Plan of Action on Cultural Cooperation adopted at the first Meeting of the Ministers of Culture of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, held on 4 and 5 September 1997.

My delegation, on behalf of the sponsors of this draft resolution, again requests the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to do everything in their power to encourage those countries to honour their own promises and thereby allow the United Nations and the countries of origin to achieve their aims.

As the Assembly will note, the draft resolution before the Assembly is essentially procedural. Taking note with satisfaction of the report of the Secretary-General submitted in cooperation with the Director-General of UNESCO, it recalls earlier resolutions, of course, as well as the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property adopted on 14 November 1970 by the General Conference of UNESCO.

It welcomes the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted in Medellín. I wish once again to thank the Government of Colombia for having hosted that first Meeting, which was so important to our Ministers of Culture.

The draft resolution commends UNESCO on the zeal and skill it has displayed, in particular in the promotion of the return of cultural property.

The Assembly will certainly recognize the importance to our countries of the restitution of cultural property taken years ago by the colonial Powers. Our countries support all the initiatives and recommendations of the Assembly and hope that the Secretary-General, in collaboration with the Director-General of UNESCO, will submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session a detailed report on the progress they will undoubtedly register with regard to the return of cultural property to the countries of origin.

On behalf of all the sponsors of draft resolution A/52/L.12, my delegation recommends this text to the attention of all delegations and thanks them for their support.

Mr. Bohaievs'ky (Ukraine): Cultural sovereignty and the upholding of national identity have always been recognized as important elements of national sovereignty and important preconditions for the cultural development of any country. Therefore, any attempt to deprive nations of their cultural property is a threat not only to their sovereignty and national identity, but also to the vital elements of the common heritage of nations. There is no need to prove that every nation has the right to a national and cultural heritage, and in this context the restitution of historical and cultural property is an indispensable element for enjoying this right.

Politically, legally, socially and ethically, the return of cultural treasures to the countries of their origin is an extraordinarily delicate problem. That is why in every specific case it should be dealt with in an appropriate manner, with due regard for the conditions in which a masterpiece was relocated — that is, whether it was stolen, bought, presented as a gift, found by archaeologists or taken as a result of military operations or colonial plundering and so on.

These issues should be solved on the basis of generally recognized principles of international law and by the application of civilized moral standards. Mutual respect for spiritual sentiments and the needs of nations should determine the relationship between States and their attitude towards the solution of the problems of restitution. We note with satisfaction the growing understanding that the restitution of cultural property scattered throughout the world is a moral obligation of humankind.

For its part, Ukraine is trying to make its political and practical contribution to solving this issue. It has ratified a number of relevant international instruments, including the 1970 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. In September of 1994, under the aegis of UNESCO, an international seminar took place in the Ukrainian city of Chernihiv on the issues of restitution of national and cultural objects that were lost or displaced during the Second World War. In December 1996, the capital of Ukraine hosted the international symposium entitled "Legal Aspects of Restitution of Cultural Property: Theory and Practice".

The fact that Ukraine is making valuable contributions to international cooperation in the field of the restitution of cultural property was proved by its election to the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation. Ukraine is also developing bilateral cooperation, and such cooperation is yielding positive results.

In our view, the following measures would be appropriate to enhance international efforts in this field. First, the role of UNESCO should be strengthened. Secondly, those Member States which have not done so should be further encouraged to adopt relevant legal acts and join the 1970 UNESCO Convention and the Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects, which was opened for signature in Rome on 24 June 1995. Thirdly, the conclusion of bilateral and multilateral agreements should be encouraged, with the aim of preventing the illegal circulation of cultural objects and promoting their restitution. Fourthly, the inventory of lost cultural property should be initiated. Lastly, the activities of mass media and educational institutions to make public opinion aware of the necessity of the restitution of cultural property and the prevention of illegal circulation of cultural property should be intensified.

New thinking should be promoted among collectors and other persons dealing with the circulation of cultural property. It is important to develop a kind of code of conduct for such groups of people, as well as national legislative provisions which would prevent illegal trade in works of art. We also believe that there is a need for the creation, under the auspices of UNESCO, of a special fund to promote restitution of cultural property. In our view, UNESCO could also contribute to the establishment of an international cultural order in the context of the global culture of peace, which could underpin a fruitful dialogue between nations. Finally, the United Nations should consider the possibility of proclaiming 1999 an international year for the preservation, protection and restitution of cultural property.

As was stated in the Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies, every nation has the right and duty to defend and preserve its cultural heritage, since the viability of any society is inseparable from the national values in which its citizens find a source for their creativity.

It has been recognized by many that in many cases cooperation between States and nations depends on the successful resolution of issues related to the return and restitution of cultural treasures to the countries of their origin. It is on this understanding that we should base our approach to the issue under consideration. Otherwise, we will continue to be involved in endless discussions with no substantial outcome.

Mr. Mra (Myanmar): The importance of agenda item 27, entitled "Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin", in international relations is reflected in the periodic consideration of this question by the General Assembly. The commitment of the international community to the question keeps alive the process of negotiations that will enable the countries concerned to recover the cultural property that has been appropriated.

In this regard, we are grateful to the Secretary-General and the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for the information provided in the report contained in document A/52/211, dated 25 June 1997, on UNESCO's continuing efforts for promotion of bilateral negotiations for the return or restitution of cultural property and on its work to curb illicit traffic in cultural property. We are convinced that these steadfast efforts not only enhance international awareness of the question before us but also contribute to better understanding among nations.

We are also encouraged to observe that the report reflects success in a number of cases. We view these successes as positive signs. We are convinced that, through a genuine spirit of cooperation, pending cases will also find solutions acceptable to the parties concerned through bilateral negotiations.

It is gratifying that the ninth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation was able to take up important questions, such as the creation of standardized national inventories, an international database of movable cultural property, an international code of ethics for art dealers and the creation of an international fund to facilitate the restitution of stolen cultural objects. Further discussion of these questions, it is hoped, will eventually lead to certain concrete actions which will have a bearing on the efforts of UNESCO to curb illicit trade in cultural property.

Among the recommendations adopted by the ninth session of the Intergovernmental Committee, Recommendation No. 5, on an international code of ethics for art dealers, is particularly interesting. Despite doubts expressed at the session concerning its non-binding character, an international code of ethics for dealers, together with such existing codes for some dealers' associations, could serve as a tool in the future in drawing a distinction between the licit and illicit trade in cultural objects and will provide guidance for transactions in ambiguous situations. Further exploration of the views on the question is a step in the right direction. We believe that the Director-General of UNESCO will be able to implement other recommendations and achieve positive results.

Myanmar subscribes to the view that the cultural heritage of a people conditions its overall development. Likewise, the loss of a people's cultural heritage leads to its cultural impoverishment and loss of identity. Myanmar, whose civilization dates back many centuries, attaches great importance to its cultural heritage, and its preservation is regarded as a national undertaking. The Government has laid down a national objective entitled "Uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of the cultural heritage and national character" as one of the social objectives of the country. With this objective in mind, the process of safeguarding and preserving Myanmar's cultural heritage is an ongoing undertaking carried out by the Government, which is spending millions of kyats. Fully aware of the significance of this process, the people of the country are also contributing to the process in various ways.

Our efforts to recover the cultural property seized and removed from Myanmar in the past constitute part of this undertaking. This is being done with the assistance of UNESCO. In view of the heartening successes in certain cases reflected in the report of the Secretary-General, we very much hope that Myanmar's efforts will achieve similar success.

The commitment of all States to the principles concerning the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin is vitally important. This commitment alone can enhance cooperation among nations and lead to the amicable resolution of the pending specific cases.

Myanmar believes that, with this commitment on the part of all States concerned, UNESCO's efforts in this regard will be successful.

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait) (*interpretation from Arabic*): My delegation has reviewed the report of the Secretary-General, presented in cooperation with the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) [A/52/211], which is under consideration today. I should like in this regard to express Kuwait's satisfaction at the contents of the report, which include important points.

We commend the efforts of UNESCO and the Intergovernmental Committee concerned with the restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin, or its return to those countries in cases of illegal acquisition of such property. In this regard, we particularly commend the efforts aimed at encouraging the promotion of bilateral negotiations to ensure that the properties are inventoried and to limit their illicit traffic. We in Kuwait join our voice to the call for the restitution to the countries of origin of all artworks, archaeological pieces, manuscripts, historical documents, and all other cultural and artistic treasures. This should contribute to bolstering international cooperation, to the preservation of the world's cultural heritage, and to its further development.

Kuwait appreciates fully the great sadness that States and individuals experience at their loss of their cultural treasures which preserve for them their history, civilization and indigenous cultures which are usually in their custody for successive generations. This is especially so when the loss occurs through theft, looting and the destruction of these important historic treasures before the very eyes of a society that made every effort to preserve this high level of culture.

Kuwaiti society endured this very bitter experience during the 1990 oppressive Iraqi occupation, when Iraqi soldiers perpetrated acts of arbitrary destruction and of systematic theft and looting of Kuwait's cultural and archaeological properties, taking them to Iraq in an attempt to obliterate Kuwait's cultural and civilizational development from the annals of history.

I find myself compelled to refer to some of the negative impacts of the Iraqi occupation, especially as regards Kuwait's cultural property. First, 140 manuscripts and historical pictures which were located in Kuwait's central library were looted or destroyed. Of this number, only 15 manuscripts are left. Secondly, the department of Arab heritage of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature experienced grave cultural losses. Rare and original manuscripts were looted, among them precious to Kuwait gifts from Arab and foreign libraries in Berlin, Syria, and Tunisia. This is in addition to dictionaries and rare Arab books brought from the Netherlands, Great Britain, Germany and Russia.

Thirdly, the National Museum of Kuwait was subjected to the ugliest forms of comprehensive destruction of historical monuments, especially of pieces located in the museum's department of Islamic archaeology. Iraqi soldiers destroyed and burned historical manuscripts. The same was done to archaeological treasures located in building number 1 and the museum of the island of Faylakah, which date from the Bronze Age and the Hellenic or Islamic eras. Fourthly, rare archaeological pieces were taken from the red palace in the city of Al Jahrah and from the window exhibits of Kuwait's international airport. In this context, I should like to say that since the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation nothing new has occurred with regard to this situation. Those pieces that have been returned from Iraq through the United Nations were either defective or broken or were missing a great deal of their features.

We in Kuwait call on the international community, represented by the United Nations and UNESCO, to continue their efforts to exert pressure on the Iraqi Government to comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions in order to ensure the restitution of all Kuwaiti cultural property as soon as possible. This should include official State documents including the private archives of the office of His Highness the Emir of Kuwait, the archives of the Foreign Ministry, as well as documents of important Kuwaiti institutions, which constitute a complete record of the country's history.

Although we are satisfied with the report of the Secretary-General and the Director-General of UNESCO referred to earlier, we hope that the next report, which will be considered at the fifty-fourth session under this agenda item, will include a separate paragraph embodying more comprehensive information about international efforts in this regard, especially if no appreciable progress has been made in the area.

In conclusion, I should like to reiterate Kuwait's support for UNESCO. We commend it for the role it has been playing in the return or restitution of cultural properties to the countries of origin, as we consider these properties to have a fundamental cultural value for their respective societies in that they provide a historical and cultural continuum through successive generations.

Mr. Najem (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*interpretation from Arabic*): All peoples attach special importance to their cultural property, because it is a part of their history and symbolizes their deep roots and their civilizations. Today's discussion is therefore of great importance, as it is part of a new campaign against individuals and States to make them return or restore to the countries of origin whatever they looted in the past: manuscripts, archaeological artefacts and other works of great artistic value.

Over the past five centuries, Libya, like many other States, was the victim of vast cultural pillage. Conditions dictated by the occupiers opened the door to the vast, systematic looting of Libya's ancient Arab cultural heritage. Anyone who visits the famous museums in Europe and the Americas will see many works of art and valuable manuscripts exquisitely wrought by the artistic creative hands of Arab Libyans, who left behind a great historical heritage which was looted and scattered around the world by the colonial Powers, which stripped away many of its most important features.

The Arab Libyans laid the foundations of ancient, prehistoric civilizations. They contributed also to the building of many later civilizations, as can be seen in museums and documentation centres, whose holdings testify to the vast quantity of Libyan artefacts and sculptures. Many of these are displayed, while still more are hidden away in the storerooms of foreign museums all over the world. Suffice it to mention that in 1860, 165 artefacts were looted from the eastern Libyan archaeological city of Shehat; other artefacts — pottery and jars — elucidating the history of that city were also looted, along with thousands of rare coins. Historical sources indicate that dozens of huge columns and several ornamented architectural elements were taken in that year from western Libya to the United Kingdom for use as garden ornaments for the queen. The same source indicates also that 350 marble pillars and thousands of small artefacts were also stolen from the same location. From Bengazi alone, 600 pieces dating back to prehistoric times were stolen; these are now on display in a famous European museum.

Through the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations has tried to restore such artefacts, works of art and manuscripts to their countries of origin. As noted in the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/52/211, progress has been limited, despite repeated attempts over the past 20 years and more. It is regrettable that some of the countries that possess these cultural treasures still refuse to accede to the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. This must be condemned; and the true nature of those claiming to be the leaders of modern civilization, the protectors of human rights and the keepers of the heritage of mankind must be exposed.

We should not stop here. It is important to punish those who have committed such crimes so that they will not repeat them in the future and as a deterrent to others. The point of the punishment would be to prevent repetition of such acts in the future. Those who commit crimes must know that they will be punished sooner or later.

We call upon the international community to stop toying with the cultural history of mankind. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya — among the first countries to propose that the General Assembly discuss this item a little more than two decades ago — insists on the restoration of its historical heritage whether it be in the form of jewels, artefacts or manuscripts. Now that we have gained complete freedom, we understand the harm done to us through this theft and pillage, and we demand that the countries that are holding our intellectual property restore our possessions to us, because their ownership is based on theft, which is prohibited by law and by the decree of God. If they delay or procrastinate, we will be obliged to resort to all available means to regain our possessions, including bringing suit in international courts. We cannot stand idly by when our historical heritage is at stake, because it is ours, and symbolizes our identity and our civilization. It is a living expression of our deep cultural roots and a legitimate right which we shall insist on from generation to generation.

Mr. Zacharakis (Greece): Draft resolution A/52/L.12 deals with a question that has been before the General Assembly for many years and which reflects concerns that are shared by many States Members of the Organization.

The report of the Secretary-General submitting the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) depicts the untiring efforts of the Secretary-General and the Director-General to enhance world awareness and to assist States in claiming their cultural property. We thank them and reaffirm our support for their efforts. However, the report also clearly reveals the difficulties that the United Nations and UNESCO are confronting in launching the process that would lead to the return of illicitly appropriated cultural property.

As a country with an important cultural history, and as the victim of systematic plundering of its cultural treasures, Greece attaches great importance to the restitution of illicitly appropriated cultural property to its country of origin. It has to be recalled that not even one of the major monuments in Greece has escaped pillaging. In fact, invaluable parts of these monuments have been removed and transferred abroad, far away from their original architectural structures.

We firmly believe that such actions, which reflect tendencies and attitudes of dark periods of the past, do not match present realities, and the unfortunate results of those past actions should not be perpetuated by our inaction and silence. In this context, we deemed it our duty to co-sponsor this draft resolution, just as we did in 1995. We are determined to spare no effort to curb the illicit traffic in cultural treasures and to promote the return of cultural property to its countries of origin or its restitution in case of illicit appropriation.

To this end we are actively participating in UNESCO and in the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation. We are also contributing to any effort aimed at the improvement of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, as well as at the further elaboration of the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT) Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects and the European Union regulation dealing with the transfer of cultural objects. Furthermore, we have taken initiatives aimed at the protection of cultural treasures of our neighbouring countries which experienced the aftermath of the Balkan crisis.

Being the repository of a cultural heritage which belongs to the whole world, Greece strongly believes that is our duty to entrust this heritage, healed from the traumas inflicted on it both by time and by human actions, to future generations. This duty emanates from respect for our monuments and from our responsibility towards the international community.

In this context, I would like to avail myself of the opportunity to raise an issue which is of particular importance to my country. The issue of the restitution of the Parthenon Marbles has always remained open for Greece, as well as for the international cultural community, present and past, including many important figures in British history, such as Lord Byron, Shelley and Hardy. By the term "Parthenon Marbles", Greece refers to the sculptural decoration and other elements of the Parthenon, such as column drums, capitals and other elements which were removed and transferred to London by Lord Elgin and are currently on display at the British Museum. The detailed description of these elements has been submitted to UNESCO and is amply documented in international archaeological publications.

It must be noted that the Parthenon Marbles are not self-standing sculptures but indivisible elements of the Temple of the Parthenon, which constitutes the greatest monument of Greek civilization and the symbol of Western civilization, as well as the emblem of UNESCO itself. Moreover, certain of these elements are essential not only for the sake of aesthetic appearance, but also for the static stability of the Parthenon's structure, as was certified during its restoration works.

In the light of the above, it is self-explanatory why the Greek Government is requesting the restitution of the Parthenon Marbles and not simply their return. Since 1982 the matter has been referred on several occasions to the relevant UNESCO bodies, and it was submitted formally to the British Government in 1983.

A number of UNESCO bodies have repeatedly called, through relevant resolutions, for bilateral negotiations between the Greek and British Governments. This is the natural process between two countries which enjoy deep-rooted and friendly relations and are allies, European Union partners and members of the Council of Europe. Greece is willing to discuss the issue with the British Government. We are aware of the delicate nature of the issue and are dealing with it with extreme discretion. At the same time, we remain confident that our cause is justified and endorsed by the international community. We sincerely hope that the British Government and British society, with their undeniable traditional sensitivity towards cultural issues, will not take too long before redressing a grave error. This is an obligation not to Greece, but to the cultural heritage of the whole world.

As the Director-General's report observes, much has been done under the auspices of UNESCO to protect cultural property in its original and natural context and to repatriate the property illegally taken from its countries of origin. However, there is still much to be done. My country is fully prepared to cooperate with international bodies in taking all necessary measures to put an end to the illicit trafficking in cultural property and to ensure the protection, recovery and return of stolen and illegally exported cultural property. We expect that our discussion today before this Assembly will trigger a greater awakening of international public opinion in support of the return or restitution of cultural property to its countries of origin, in particular through mobilization of the information capacity of the United Nations for this purpose.

Mr. Rønneberg (Marshall Islands): The item before us has always been somewhat controversial and has been of great interest for the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands over the last few years. In the context of our debate here at the United Nations, we have become aware of and sympathetic to the situation of friendly countries whose cultural property has been veritably stolen from them during periods of war or colonialism. We can fully sympathize with their plight, and we are willing to assist with responsible support for certain measures that could be taken to alleviate the problem.

Many countries have good knowledge of what cultural icons and treasures belonging to them have been taken away over the years. This is particularly the case for the art treasures of the great civilizations, which are put on display in metropolitan cities around the world. We know a lot about these very famous items, how they were acquired and what their histories may be. But unfortunately, we cannot say the same for all countries. Let me offer an illustration.

We had known that there was a Pacific collection at a well-known university here in the United States, but we did not know that it contained a large number of artefacts from the Marshall Islands. This year, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Marshall Islands made an official visit to that university, and he viewed the collection that came from the Pacific. We were quite astonished by the fine quality of the objects, and especially by some of the handiwork involved. These artefacts were brought to the United States in the 1800s, and were representative of a very high standard and workmanship. We are now also aware of major collections being held by various institutions in Germany, a former colonial administrator. Furthermore, at a recent symposium on the Marshall Islands, we were informed of the large amount of documentation and artefacts brought back to Spain by the early explorers.

I must stress that the Marshall Islands is not calling for these artefacts to be returned as if they had been acquired by illegal means. In our case, we have ascertained that they were indeed purchased in a legally acceptable manner, that they have been cared for properly and that the cultural value of the artefacts has greatly increased in importance due to their age and their relative isolation. What we are intending to do is to seek ways in which these collections may be photographed in detail and catalogued more fully, so that Marshallese students and others can do research on these examples of the cultural history of the Marshall Islands. It is also important to us that we explore the possibility of a visiting exhibit to the Marshall Islands. From our initial conversations with the university museum administrators, they would be quite amenable to such ideas, but they were concerned about the financial costs.

This is where my delegation believes that this draft resolution could make an important contribution. In this regard, we would appeal to the international community, and to the expertise of the relevant United Nations agencies and specialized bodies, to assist us in compiling the necessary data and cataloguing the extensive materials that are housed by these institutions.

We are fearful that in the future these artefacts may decay or be lost before they can be properly documented. They represent a period in Marshall Islands history that needs to be documented better, from a cultural perspective. It is our intention to pursue the possibilities of a visiting exhibition to the Marshall Islands of these collections. After such an exhibition had ended, we could seek to have a permanent exhibition of photographs or copies of the artefacts.

The assistance of the donor community and the United Nations is absolutely essential if we are to be successful. In our view, this is the sort of activity that should be considered under the implementation of this agenda item. In collaboration with relevant United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), this could prove to be a meaningful step in the right direction, and it would not alienate from the process those who have these collections of artefacts. We will listen carefully to the views of others in this debate and we hope that our comments may provide a useful input to the discussion.

Mr. Al-Hitti (Iraq) (*interpretation from Arabic*): At the outset, my delegation would like to welcome the report of the Secretary-General [A/52/211] before us, which deals with the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin. We are very happy with the recommendations adopted at the ninth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation.

In this respect, we should like to welcome the attention devoted by the secretariat of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to the issue of training members of different professions affected by the issue of the illicit traffic in cultural property, such as law-enforcement officials and museum curators. My delegation would like to express its full and unreserved support for the activities of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), in combating the scourge of the illicit traffic in cultural property, and in particular for its activities in publishing and disseminating information about stolen cultural property. I should also like to reaffirm the fact that my country attaches importance to the exchange of information between databases on stolen cultural property, and supports the establishment of an international fund to facilitate the restitution of stolen or illegally exported cultural property. We should also make art collectors, auctioneers and art gallery owners, more aware of the need to combat the traffic in cultural property.

The fact that the General Assembly considers this issue on a regular basis demonstrates its importance for international relations. The problem has become increasingly serious in recent years because of the renewed growth in the illicit traffic in cultural property, especially archaeological remains, resulting from the deteriorating economic situation of some developing countries and the devaluation of their currencies in comparison with those of a small number of developed countries. Dealers in this handful of industrialized countries have exploited the situation and appropriated this property. Global economic stagnation has further aggravated the problem. Some owners of private capital in western countries have, therefore, been able to buy and appropriate archaeological remains as a reserve investment, to such an extent that trade in archaeological remains from developing countries has become an activity that is organized and led by companies and auction houses openly and with the knowledge of the Governments of the countries concerned.

Despite the fact that several agreements and international instruments grant countries the right to recover their cultural property and to prohibit the illegal traffic, many countries that have appropriated such property refuse to accede to the agreements and do nothing to facilitate bilateral negotiations aimed at restoring the remains to their countries of origin.

Iraq is known as the cradle of the earliest human civilizations and for the diversity of its cultural heritage. Indeed, it is the depositary of the treasures passed down by these civilizations. That is why it is a prime target for the theft of archaeological treasures by the old colonizing Powers or by certain countries that wish to include these rare pieces in their museums. As a result of this systematic pillaging, foreign museums will henceforth overflow with Iraqi archaeological treasures, not to mention the artefacts held in private collections or collections offered by antique dealers. Iraq is continuing to be subjected to the pillage of its cultural artefacts and remains, which has intensified in recent years. The aerial bombardments of the allied forces against Iraqi towns and villages have partially or entirely destroyed Iraqi cultural landmarks, including mosques, churches and archaeological sites. The sanctions imposed on Iraq and the foreign interference in its domestic affairs have given rise to clandestine excavations that have enabled their organizers to appropriate and sell cultural property and rare art objects of inestimable value, as well as manuscripts and antique books. This systematic sabotage of Iraq's cultural identity is increasing as the grip of the embargo imposed on the Iraqi people is tightened. These illegal activities involve the destruction of the cultural heritage of nations and mutilate their sources of cultural creativity throughout history.

We are grateful to UNESCO for its efforts to encourage the international community to pay greater attention to this problem and to help countries to recover their cultural property. We call on all States to cooperate fully with UNESCO so that it can achieve this objective in conformity with the principles of equity and justice in international relations. In this respect we welcome the eight recommendations adopted by the Intergovernmental Committee at its ninth session, held in Paris from 16 to 19 September 1996, in particular Recommendation No. 7, which invites the Director-General of UNESCO to do his utmost to help in the tracing and return of the cultural and archaeological properties stolen and smuggled from Iraq.

We also call for the strengthening of the international conventions that are currently in force designed to protect cultural heritage throughout the world and to provide technical assistance to countries in serious difficulties related to the illicit traffic in artifacts from their cultural heritage. We hope that the United Nations, through its specialized agencies, will continue to step us its efforts to sensitize international public opinion to the irreparable losses suffered by the cultural heritage of certain countries because of pillaging and destruction, and prompt a more general awareness with regard to the return or restitution of cultural properties to their countries of origin. The loss of the cultural heritage of some States is a loss for the culture of the world, for future generations and for humankind as a whole.

Through its participation in international organizations and through bilateral channels, my country, Iraq, is working to recover Iraqi manuscripts and archaeological artefacts that are currently in European countries, and whose holders have confirmed that they were taken out of Iraq illegally. Iraq has drafted a law to prohibit in particular the import of archaeological remains from other countries if they are not authenticated and accompanied by a permit in due form, and to ban the transit of archaeological remains through the territory of third States if those conditions are not met.

On 29 October 1992, Iraq informed UNESCO, through four sets of documents, of the loss of cultural and archaeological items during the military aggression and of the thousands of archaeological relics stolen from Iraqi museums.

As is well known, all works of art, manuscripts or other archaeological or cultural relics embody the cultural heritage of a people, which has the right to be proud of and to attach special importance to these cultural objects that belong first and foremost to their creators, their artisans and their people. That is why the people are the legitimate owners.

This injustice from the past can be redressed today if certain countries imbibe the principles of justice and fairness and put an end to the kind of selfishness that characterized the colonial period and resulted in the systematic pillaging of the wealth of others, including their patrimony. The logic of law and justice calls for the restitution of such property to its rightful owners and to its countries of origin, since it is an expression of the cultural identity of the people who produced it, which is why such property is a matter of such interest and importance at the national level.

The restitution of that cultural property could contribute to the cultural liberation of countries whose archaeological and historical objects have been stolen. It would constitute a humanitarian measure and the necessary fulfilment of a moral duty by the States which took this property and by international organizations.

We must send a clear message demanding the restitution to the rightful owners of all that has been stolen or pillaged because illegal appropriation does not give those who hold these stolen objects any rights. I should like here to refer to the statement made by the representative of Kuwait a short while ago, which we consider to be quite exaggerated. Nor do we think it appropriate to indulge in such talk under the current agenda item.

That being said, I wish to recall that all Kuwaiti property has been restored, and we are quite prepared to cooperate with the United Nations coordinator entrusted with this matter to return to Kuwait all Kuwaiti property that we discover in the future.

Mr. Cho (Republic of Korea): It was nearly 25 years ago that the General Assembly first addressed the issue of the restitution of cultural property to its countries of origin. My delegation is gratified to see today that the General Assembly is once again considering this pressing issue, which has acquired added urgency over the past few years due to the increased international awareness of its importance.

In this regard, my delegation notes with appreciation the report of the Secretary-General (A/52/211), submitted in cooperation with the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The report provides a helpful account of the work that is being done to promote the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin and highlights the need for the international community to cooperate more closely in this area.

Cultural property is the embodiment of the history and culture of a nation, and therefore we believe it can be best valued and appreciated when it is preserved in its country of origin. However, over the course of history — particularly during periods of armed conflict and colonization — numerous priceless cultural artefacts have been taken by illegal means from their original resting places to locations abroad. This problem is of particular significance to Korea, as numerous Korean cultural objects have been pillaged and illegally transferred abroad during our country's history of political turmoil, especially in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

The Korean Government has launched an effort to locate these missing cultural objects by investigating the background of their illicit transfer. As part of this effort, we have been compiling an extensive inventory of all Korean cultural properties illegally transferred abroad, with a view to seeking their return or restitution, mainly through bilateral negotiations with the countries concerned.

Through these efforts, we have been able to achieve some concrete results. A total of 1,659 objects have been voluntarily returned through bilateral agreements with the Japanese Government. An additional 1,642 items have been returned through public and private donations, mostly from Japan. We are grateful to the countries concerned for their invaluable cooperation.

However, we must also admit that there are cases of less encouraging progress in other bilateral negotiations due to the apparent lack of a sincere spirit of cooperation. For example, the progress achieved so far in our efforts to retrieve the Korean Royal Archives from a certain European country has not yet met our expectations.

It is our strong view that cultural artefacts unlawfully taken away by forcible means cannot be regarded as the property of the countries which currently have them in their possession. Regardless of their current location, those objects remain the property of their countries of origin. They must therefore be returned so that they can be truly preserved and valued in their historical surroundings by the people for whom those objects are an important part of cultural heritage.

This principle is, in our view, fundamental and must be upheld in order to ensure that justice and genuine international cooperation prevail in the international community. It is embodied in the various international instruments and conventions, including the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which provide a framework to facilitate the return of cultural property and prohibit illicit trafficking in them.

My delegation earnestly hopes that those countries which have acquired cultural properties by illegal means will abide by this fundamental principle of the international community, and thus be forthcoming in facilitating bilateral negotiations for the return or restitution of such property to the countries of origin. To ensure satisfactory progress in pursuit of this goal, we believe it is critically important that some countries summon the political will to look beyond the narrow nationalistic interests of the past for the benefit of common interests and cooperation in the future. Equally vital, in our view, is the commitment of the international community as a whole to intensify its efforts to promote a just and fair solution to this important issue.

In this regard, we commend the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation for the important role it has played in promoting bilateral negotiations between requesting and holding countries and in arousing international public opinion on this important issue. My delegation believes that the activities of UNESCO and other relevant organizations in this regard should be strengthened through the support of the United Nations and the cooperation of concerned countries so as to encourage the return of cultural property to its rightful owners.

It is our firm belief that in order to treasure and protect the rich cultural heritage of humankind for generations to come, the international community must do all it can to preserve the respective cultural artefacts of each country, and ensure that those artefacts and objects are restored to their rightful countries of origin. The Republic of Korea will strive to contribute to that vital task, and in that regard we firmly support, as a sponsor, draft resolution A/52/L.12, which is sure, in our view, to foster an environment in which cultural properties can be returned or restituted in a timely manner.

Mr. Zackheos (Cyprus): The report of the Secretary-General on the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin delivers a hopeful message that much of what was needed to be done is being done and that the important efforts of protecting cultural properties are well on their way to bearing fruitful results.

For this hopeful picture, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and its Director-General deserve to be commended. Certainly, not all the provisions and goals set by General Assembly resolutions have been implemented. We are gratified, however, by the progress report of UNESCO, in document A/52/211, dated 25 June 1997, and especially by its account of the results of the holding of the ninth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation, as well as by the adoption of eight recommendations, as contained in appendix I of the above-mentioned report.

We commend UNESCO's efforts to promote bilateral negotiations for the return or restitution of cultural property as a matter of cultural continuity and justice, the preparation of inventories of movable cultural properties, the dissemination of information and efforts to establish a code of ethics for art dealers, auction houses and galleries. Similarly, we note in the report the entry into force of the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT) Convention and of the efforts to improve existing international conventions for the protection of world cultural properties and agree that our central goal should be increasing the number of ratifications and providing technical assistance to States with acute problems of illicit trafficking in archaeological objects, as well as aiding countries experiencing armed conflicts.

It is very correctly stated in the report that the return or restitution of cultural and artistic treasures to countries of origin contributes to the strengthening of international cooperation. The establishment of an international fund to facilitate the restitution of stolen property will be of great practical assistance to these States.

Our interest in the subject emanates from our desire to communicate again with the international community and to seek its solidarity and assistance for the preservation of the cultural identity of the occupied territories of Cyprus. The occupying Power's policy of changing the demographic and cultural character of Cyprus by the importation of settlers and the destruction, desecration and pillaging, especially of places of worship as a result of the 1974 invasion, constitute a continuous haemorrhage of our cultural heritage. To highlight the immensity of the destruction, I cite here some figures. First, some 15,000 to 20,000 icons have been removed. Secondly, several dozen major frescos and mosaics dating from the sixth century A.D. to the fifteenth century have been segmented for sale abroad. Thirdly, several thousand antiquities and individual objects of historical interest, such as wooden carvings, crosses, bibles and so forth, have disappeared.

As recently as one month ago, stolen Cypriot church objects, such as frescos, icons, ancient pottery and statues were discovered by the German police in Munich in the residence of a Turkish national. The recovery included over 100 valuable pieces of art from the period from the sixth to the fifteenth century. The Government and the Church of Cyprus have spared no effort or money in seeking to recover, or even buy back, whatever Cypriot antiquities could be salvaged. In this endeavour, we are grateful to those individuals, institutions and international organizations for their cooperation and assistance for the discovery and return of many significant treasures.

The first major victory relating to stolen objects occurred with the return to Cyprus, following a civil case in the United States, of four mosaics originating from the Kanakaria church, dating from A.D. 525. The mosaics are now exhibited in the Byzantine Museum in Nicosia. Nevertheless, despite the assistance of organizations, including UNESCO, the Council of Europe, Europa Nostra, the International Council on Monuments and Sites and INTERPOL, as well as devoted curators and scholars throughout the world, a vast number of objects and artefacts remain in the wrong hands. We are faced with an uphill struggle, as we still have no control over the fate of our heritage in our own territory in the occupied part of the Republic.

This territory, may I remind the Assembly, includes the largest part of the island's archaeological and historic sites: the Venetian walls of Famagusta, the medieval castles of Kyrenia, the archaeological sites of Salamis, Mycenaean Engomi, churches and monasteries built between the fourth and the eleventh centuries, as well as neolithic bronze Phoenician, Greek and Roman sites. We hope that the United Nations, through its specialized agencies, will continue to contribute towards increasing the awareness of the international community of the importance of safeguarding the cultural heritage of Cyprus and, in fact, of all States. The archaeological treasures of States are treasures of the world. Their loss will be a loss to mankind and to global civilization.

As to those who intentionally destroy the cultural heritage of States, the words of Euripides echo through the ages as a stern warning.

> "Fool is the one who sacks a city, making a desert of temples, pillaging the tombs, the sanctuaries of the dead, for he prepares his own doom in times to come."

Ms. Rodríguez (Peru) (*interpretation from Spanish*): As heir to one of the oldest and richest civilizations in the world, Peru draws on immense and extremely varied cultural resources. My delegation is therefore taking the floor on this item, given its extreme importance.

Peru greatly appreciates the work done by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) with regard to the return of cultural property to its countries of origin or its restitution in case of illicit appropriation. We would like especially to commend the work of the Director-General of UNESCO, as well as that of the Intergovernmental Committee established to those ends.

Likewise, we commend UNESCO's overall efforts to promote the return of property or its restitution in case of illicit appropriation to its countries of origin. We thank the Director-General of UNESCO for his report contained in document A/52/211, on whichmy delegation would like to make the following comments.

Peru gives its full support to the Intergovernmental Committee as the international negotiating forum for reaching satisfactory solutions on behalf of countries seeking to recover their cultural property. We can mention specifically, as a result of such endeavours, the return by Honduras of various art objects, for which we express our heartfelt thanks to its Government. At the bilateral level, we would like to express the same gratitude to the Government of Canada, which on 28 November 1997 will officially return to Peru a collection of valuable pre-Columbian pieces. We also attach great importance to the memorandum of understanding signed on 9 June of this year between the Government of the United States and our own Government to restrict the importation to the United States of Peruvian pre-Columbian and colonial materials.

We firmly believe that international cooperation is fundamental for curbing illicit traffic in cultural property. Peru thanks UNESCO for its activities designed to provide the appropriate training to various categories of professionals who deal with the issue of illicit traffic in cultural property. We recommend that UNESCO continue to give priority to this matter. In this connection, Peru once again requests UNESCO to cooperate in the training of officials entrusted with enforcing the law on the protection of the nation's cultural heritage, since in recent years my country has continued to suffer great losses of its cultural heritage because of clandestine excavations and subsequent illicit traffic.

We are also grateful to the International Council of Museums (ICOM) for the publication of a training manual for the documentation of African collections, as an additional effort to facilitate the establishment of national inventories and the training of local personnel.

We share the views of the representative of the Getty Information Institute on the need to rely on some standardized, basic method of exchanging information on stolen cultural property and on the importance of having precise information about such property, as well as the conclusion that only through closer cooperation between private organizations and the public sector, at both the national and the international level, will we be able to curb this illicit traffic.

Peru, a signatory of the 1995 Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects of the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT), appeals to those countries that have not yet done so to adhere to or ratify the UNESCO and UNIDROIT Conventions. We welcome with satisfaction the UNIDROIT initiative to establish a database of legislation and international conventions for the protection of cultural property, States' participation and a bibliography.

Peru supports the establishment of an international fund to facilitate the restitution of stolen or illicitly exported cultural property, which would be of benefit to those countries that cannot pay the costs entailed by this effort. We believe that the establishment of this fund must take a number of factors into account, particularly the sources of funding, in order to ensure its effectiveness and viability.

Peru believes it advisable to adopt a code of ethics for art dealers and other professionals in the field of cultural property. Though non-binding, such a code will make it possible to enhance ethical standards in the art trade.

In addition, we fully agree with the importance attached to a public awareness campaign to curb illicit traffic in cultural property, and we believe the Internet is a valuable tool for that purpose. In this connection, my delegation commends the Government of France for its valuable initiative to disseminate via the Internet information on French museums' holdings of cultural property whose owners are unknown and which has never been claimed.

For these reasons, the delegation of Peru fully supports the text of draft resolution A/52/L.12, now before the General Assembly for consideration.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

Before proceeding to take action on draft resolution A/52/L.12, I should like to announce that since its introduction, Egypt has become a sponsor of the draft resolution.

The Assembly will now proceed to take a decision on draft resolution A/52/L.12.

One representative wishes to make a statement in explanation of vote before the voting. May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Dlamini (Swaziland): My delegation is appreciative indeed of this debate on the restoration or restitution of cultural property. I am speaking as a son of Africa and also as a student of history who has seen how much havoc was brought on the developing nations, particularly in my continent, Africa.

Prior to debating this subject, we debated the question of languages. The way in which we African nations were deprived of our own languages, which are also our heritage, is another important phenomenon.

Thank God, however, that we in the Kingdom of Swaziland are still one of those unique nations in Africa that retains our heritage, languages and traditional institutions. We praise the Almighty God, who blinded the eyes and minds of those who were responsible for the illicit trafficking and extermination of our African heritage.

I have a question: Who are these that are still the culprits today? The draft resolution and agenda item are not coming before the Assembly for the first time. The culprits are known. Can they behave like Christians in a church who, when they are convinced of their sins, simply stand up and say, "We confess our misdeeds"? For sure, they know themselves, and they know the heritage they took from other nations.

I am thinking of the Rosetta Stone, which was taken from Egypt, I am thinking of the papyrus material that was taken from Egypt, and, on a more serious note, I am thinking of the embalmed bodies that were taken by some Members of the United Nations to use to serve as centres to attract tourism. I shudder to say that those culprits are Members of the United Nations. My delegation would therefore humbly request them that of their own accord, and having heard and understood the cry of the world, they restitute these heritage properties.

We Africans have a bad history. We have heard our brothers and sisters who were hewn from our continent and taken elsewhere on the globe. While on their way their teeth were extracted forcibly, their morals were extracted forcibly, and their brains were extracted forcibly and kept in certain museums. This, we regard as a heritage for Africa, and we are saying that the time has come that such should be restored, with a minimum of compensation at the most.

Paragraphs 6 and 7 of the report, however, give my delegation a sense of encouragement that certain countries have agreed to return the heritage wherever it was taken. Heaven is theirs, I can assure them, because they are telling the truth. God the Almighty will reward them if they honour what they have said in paragraphs 6 and 7 and if they can live up to their promises.

We call for yet other Members to do likewise. The time to restore what was accidentally taken from us has come. We suffered from the boundaries that divided Africa, we suffered from the languages that divided us in Africa. I am no longer able to understand and communicate with my brother in Central Africa. I am no longer able to communicate and understand my brother in the western part of Africa. All that was due to the history that has been imposed on us.

As the United Nations, we want to forgive them. As Member States we want to forgive them. But let them live up to their promises. In future, the draft resolution should be a consensus resolution because of the fact that we shall be in a position to understand and agree mutually.

The Acting President: We have heard the only speaker in explanation of vote before the voting.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/52/L.12. I call first on the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Perfiliev (Director, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs Division): I should like to inform members that, should the General Assembly adopt draft resolution A/52/L.12, there will be no programme budget implications.

The Acting President: A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Benin, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, China, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, Ghana, Greece, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Saint Lucia, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Slovakia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Swaziland, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Zambia

Against:
None

Abstaining:
Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Denmark, France, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, San Marino, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

Draft resolution A/52/L.12 was adopted by 87 votes to none, with 23 abstentions (resolution 52/24).

[Subsequently the delegation of Hungary informed the Secretariat that it had intended to vote in favour.]

The Acting President: The delegation of Kuwait has asked to speak in exercise of the right of reply. I remind members that, in accordance with decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply shall be limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Al-Awdi (Kuwait) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I would like to express my regret at having to ask for the floor at such a late hour. I listened attentively to what the representative of Iraq said a little while ago on agenda item 27, regarding the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin. I would like to make the following remarks in this regard.

First, my delegation has taken note of what the delegation of Iraq said towards the end of his statement about their readiness to cooperate in restoring Kuwaiti property, and we hope that this will be done in a serious manner. Secondly, my delegation remains committed to all that was said by the Permanent Representative of Kuwait on this item just a while ago.

Thirdly, the representative of Iraq's characterization of what was stated by the Permanent Representative of Kuwait regarding the negative impact of the oppressive Iraqi occupation on the cultural property of Kuwait as exaggerated is wrong and Iraq cannot deny it. The destruction and pillaging of important cultural and historical property perpetrated by the occupying Iraqi soldiers in Kuwait in 1990 has been documented by concerned international organizations. It was also witnessed by me, as a Kuwaiti citizen, before I became a diplomat here. As a Kuwaiti I lived out the period of Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, and I have personally seen the deliberate destruction by the Iraqi Republican Guards of museums and cultural property in Kuwait. I cannot forget seeing the Iraqi occupiers accompanied by a director of one of the Iraqi national museums or cultural centres break down the doors of the National Museum and then loot and steal the Museum's acquisitions, removing them to Iraq.

Fourthly, Iraq is creative in contradicting itself and its acts. When the representative of the Iraqi regime refers to the importance of cultural property for States and calls for not trafficking illegally in them and for their restoration, he is simply ignoring that his own regime has done the same heinous thing. This does not surprise us because we have grown accustomed to the style of contradiction which the Iraqi regime lives by.

Fifthly, I would like to reaffirm that this is the appropriate item under which we can express Kuwaiti concerns regarding Iraq's refusal to return the rest of Kuwaiti intellectual property. And what has been returned has arrived destroyed and defective. Therefore, we again call upon Iraq to cooperate seriously in implementing the relevant Security Council resolution.

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 27?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 7.40 p.m.